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FLASH PUT HIS HAND TO HIS BROW TO SHUT OUT THE GLARE, AND LOOKED AGAIN—UNAWARE OF THE FIEND BEHIND HIM.



## Flash Lightning,

## THE MOUNTAIN MASCOT;

OR,

## JERRY JACOBS' DOOM.

A Romance of Payrock.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

## CHAPTER I.

## AN INSULT REVENGED.

FAR within the mountain-girdled and silver-yielding State of Colorado lay the village of Payrock, a mining-town of no great pretensions as a center of civilization, but with silver enough in the rocky heights around it to build a palace for every one of its tumble-down shanties.

The town was an old one for that region. Its first house had been built fully twenty years before, a length of time sufficient for the birth, growth and death of many a mining settlement. But the clatter of the stamp-mills showed that Payrock was full of life, and that its mines were still yielding their silver stores.

However, we are not at present interested in the town, with its whisky-shops, its gambling saloons, and its rough-hewn and weather-beaten inhabitants. Our interest lies in but one of its many mansions, a two-storied log house that lay in a grassy hollow to the left of the town—a roughly-built dwelling, but with green vines twined over its doorway, and a gurgling little stream, from the hills near by, flowing close beside it.

In front of this dwelling stood, on a fair morning in May, 1884, a broad-shouldered, stalwart man, of past middle age, but with a face so rugged and embrowned that it looked as if it might have stood the storms of a century. A long, wiry, gray beard drooped on his breast, and his thin hair lay in a mop on his uncovered head.

But, rough and weather-beaten as the old man appeared, his face was full of warmth and feeling, and there was a kindly look about his wrinkled eyes that would have made the most suspicious trust him.

A perplexed and careworn look marked his face as he stood in front of the doorway of the cottage, rubbing his chin reflectively with his hand.

"Folks round yere dub me Old Dug-Out," he said, "and mebbe they're 'bout *compos mentis* in that there. But ther' must ha' been some other coon dug out 'bout the same time as me that tuk all the brains and left me only the muscles. I've got plenty o' the one, but I'm everlastin' short on t'other."

He stretched out his bare and brawny arm as he spoke, and gazed at it with a dissatisfied air.

"I don't see as muscle's brung me anything 'cept hard hits, and that ain't no glory nor satisfaction to an old man as is gittin' weak in ther' joints. Brains hang out as long's ther' man lasts, but muscle is bound to gi'n out 'fore he's ready ter hand in his checks."

He walked up and down uneasily, his face working as if in deep reflection.

"I've done one good job, anyhow; I've made a man out o' Flash, and that I was bound ter do 'fore I let the little 'un slip outter my fingers. Ther' can't nobody spile him now, nary time. That job's done, and it's 'bout time I was takin' up t'other. The boy must be nigh on ter twenty-one, and he oughter know who he is and what he is."

Old Dug-Out sunk his chin in his hand, while his face grew full of thought.

"It's doubtersome if we'll ever know who the lad's parients was. I kin see 'em now as they laid with their heads smashed in by the bloody Injuns. The wagons was all afire, and I snatched the kid out jist in time to save him from bein' roasted. Poor little coon! he looked at the blaze and sung out 'Flash Lightnin'!' That's the reason I giv him that name."

"His parients must ha' been no common folks, fur they was dressed nobby; and so was the kid, fur that. And, lawsee! anybody kin see he's got good blood in him, fur he's jist the tightest and brightest lad in the Rockies."

"I'd sooner lose an eye-tooth than ter lose him; but, right's right, and I reckon I've got ter git somebody as kin read ter squint over them papers as come with ther' youngster. But if he's tuk off East, it'll be a wuss loss to the Rockies than to lose a gold-mine, for a lad like Flash is worth ten times his weight in solid gold hyer."

"That's so, Uncle Dug-Out!" cried a silvery voice, at his elbow. "But, who's talkin' 'bout takin' Flash away? I'd like to see the chap that's to do it."

The old man turned quickly and fixed his eyes on the speaker.

He saw before him a girl with pretty face and roguish black eyes, while her lips were full of mingled fun and feeling. She was well-grown, but was dressed in ragged and dirt-stained attire, while her soft, brown hair danced in elf-locks over her eyes.

"Hillo, Bess!" cried the veteran. "Why don't you whistle afore you settle down on a chap in that sudden way?"

"What's this you're sayin' 'bout Flash?" she demanded. "Nobody sha'n't take him off, now, you bet! Not while I'm round the Rockies."

"Your ears are too long, and your tongue too spry, young lady," answered the old miner. "Wait till you're axed, is my motto. What are you doin' with them there stockin's?"

He pointed to a pair of well-worn stockings she held in her hand.

"Darnin' 'em, that's all. Auntie will keep me at it, and I dunno what's the use. You can't keep the holes from comin'."

"I s'pose she wants you to look respectable."

"That's jist old auntie. She says I's got to wear shoes, 'cause it's respek'able. Them's respek'able, ain't they?"

She thrust out her foot, which was covered with a sorry apology for a shoe.

"I don't like shoes, and I won't wear 'em—there!"

A toss of her foot sent the shoe flying through the air. This revealed a foot that was covered with a stocking more dilapidated than the one she held in her hand.

"Look at that!" she cried, spitefully. "How did them holes git there? I s'poses that's got to be darned, too; and there'll be more darn than stockin' after it's done. Ain't a gal's foot prettier than sich plunder as them?"

"Maybe it is, Bess," answered Dug-Out, laughing. "I fancy Flash'd say you're was. But yer aunt's got a level head fur all that."

He turned and walked into the house.

The girl flung her work disdainfully to the ground.

"Them holes'll come ag'in, and what's the use fillin' them up? I s'pose next thing Flash'll be wantin' me to be respek'able, like they all does. Somethin' this way, isn't it?"

She thrust her foot into the discarded shoe, and began to promenade to and fro over the grass, holding her dress primly, and putting on all the fine-lady airs she knew.

"That's Miss Martin as a respek'able young lady," she said, with a laugh of disdain. "Now, here's little Rags-and-Patches when she ain't respek'able, but is havin' a good time."

She broke into a sort of Wild West breakdown, while the hair danced wildly about her face, and her eyes snapped and flashed with merriment.

Thus occupied, she failed to perceive that another person had come upon the scene, and was gazing at her with undisguised admiration.

"That's me, both ways. Which do you like best?" she demanded, with a low courtesy to a tree that stood before the house.

"How's a chap goin' to say which he likes best," demanded the new-comer, "when a girl's so dashed pretty all ways?"

The speaker was a lank-featured personage of some thirty years of age. His face looked half-rogue, half-clown. He was dressed with a cheap affectation of smartness.

The girl's eyes flashed spitefully.

"Folks round these diggin's generally wait till they're asked," she replied, tartly.

"Oh, come, now, don't be so spry. 'Tain't no harm to tell a girl she's pretty. My name's Jerry Jacobs. What's yours?"

"S'pose you ask my Aunt Molly. She'll tell you."

"What does Aunt Molly call you when she wants you?"

"When she's in good humor, she calls me Bess. But when she's out of sorts, she yells out:

"You, Bet!"

"Does that bring you?"

"You bet!"

"Good!" cried Jacobs, grinning. "I like you, Bess, and I'm glad to know you."

"I wouldn't give a moldy doughnut to know you. And, jist you mind this—if Flash was here, you'd have to slide."

"Flash! Who's Flash? a rat-tarrier?"

"If you wake up Flash, you'll find he's the rat-tarrier of the Rockies, and don't you forget it."

"I won't forget that you're just the prettiest girl in the Rockies. Dash it all, Bess! I'm in love with you at sight, and I want a kiss from your rosy lips."

"Now, you git, and lively, 'fore Flash comes, or there won't be a grease-spot left of you."

"Bah! I don't care a fig for Flash. I'm bound to have that kiss, you bet!"

He caught her before she could escape, flung his arm round her neck, and tried to steal a kiss despite her struggles.

"Let me go!" she cried, angrily. "Let me go, or I'll—Flash! Oh, where are you, Flash?"

"Jist about here, I reckon. What's the row? Hillo!"

The speaker was a tall, well-built, agile and handsome youth, who had just appeared over the brow of the hill beneath which this scene was taking place.

He was well-named, for he had come like a flash on hearing her cry, and his eyes flashed like steel-points at seeing what was going on.

"Flash!" cried the girl, with sudden joy and hope. "Do you see—"

"Yes, I see. Explanations ain't in order. We don't want no lawyer to cross-question the witnesses. But, if that game's open for outsiders, I'll take a hand."

Jacobs had released the girl on discovering that a rescuer was at hand. He stood in an uncertain attitude, as if not decided whether to fight or fly.

He did not have much time to decide. With a spring like that of a leopard the youth was on him and had him by the collar.

"What was he after, Bess?"

"Trying to kiss me, the tramp!"

"It's a kiss he wants, is it, bless his sweet soul! He shall have one, then."

"Let me go!" cried Jacobs, struggling and squirming.

"Yes, I'll let you go; like the fox lets the chicken."

In a moment he twisted him round, bent him down, and thrust the toe of his boot into his mouth. Jacobs seemed no more than a feather in his hands.

"Kiss that, you dirty dog. Now you want your pretty face washed."

Grasping him by collar and waist-band, Flash ran back and disappeared with him behind the house.

While this scene was enacting, Bess seemed beside herself with joy.

She laughed, clapped her hands, and danced up and down with an elfish satisfaction.

"I never see'd anything so jolly! Give it to him, Flash! Let him see that folks don't get kisses for the asking in these diggin's. They've got to work for 'em."

In a few minutes Flash came back empty-handed.

"What did you do with him?" she cried, in some alarm. "You ain't gone and—"

"Only left him in the duck-pond back of the hill. He can cool off there."

"You ain't drowned him?"

"That kind don't drown easy, Bess. He was made to stretch a rope, not to spoil good water. So he wanted to kiss you?"

"Yes," Bess flushed and covered her face with her hands.

"And he didn't?"

"No," looking out between her fingers.

"Then there's a kiss lying around loose, waiting for somebody to pick it up."

"Yes," said Bess, meekly.

"It won't do to waste it. I reckon I'll have to fasten on to that buss."

"You can't have it, 'cept you'll go a-froggin'. I know where there's some jolly big bull-frogs." Her eyes danced merrily.

"All right, Bess. Let's have it, then. I'd sooner catch busses than frogs any day."

"You've got to catch me first. What's worth having is worth working for."

With a gay laugh she ran swiftly away. Flash followed her more swiftly still, and soon the well-matched pair disappeared over the hill.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE ROGUE'S RUSE.

TEN minutes passed, and then a new-comer appeared upon the scene, a very different personage from those who had just vanished. He was a tall, stout, middle-aged individual, well dressed, and of gentlemanly aspect. Yet, to a judge of human nature, there would have been something doubtful in his aspect, with its thin lips, retreating eyes, and foxy expression.

He looked around him as if in search of something, with keen eyes and a cautious manner.



"This must be the house of old Dug-Out. My trail may be a false one, but if the boy he found is the one I seek, my fortune's made."

At this moment Jacobs reappeared on the scene, creeping forward in a scared and startled manner, while water dripped from every thread of his clothes, his hair was plastered over his face, and green slime lay in patches all over him.

He started back at a slight chirrup over head, and looked with alarmed eyes into the branches of a tree above him.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Squirrel! Your name's Flash, is it? Come down, you chattering rascal. I've sworn, on the honor of a Jacobs, to wring the neck of every Flash in these United States."

"Bless us!" cried the new-comer, looking at Jacobs closely. "It cannot be—"

Jacobs leaped ten paces back on hearing this voice. But in a moment he came forward again, with a look of recognition.

"Mr. Griscom!" he said. "It ain't possible? You here? In the Rockies?"

"But what in the world have you been doing?" and Griscom surveyed him from head to foot with a queer smile.

"Been frogging," explained Jacobs. "Had a little set-to with a chap they call Flash. You ought to see him, if you want somebody to laugh at."

"Come, now, none of your old lies, Jerry. So Flash dropped you in the frog-pond? What for?"

"'Cause I wanted to kiss a girl."

"Oho! you're up to your old tricks again. Look out you don't get worse than the frog-pond. From what I hear of this Flash, he's dangerous stuff to play with."

"I'm going to get even with him, if I go under for it," cried Jerry, valiantly.

"See here, Jacobs; suppose this young man should happen to be in my way? Can I count on your help?"

"There ain't a man in the States I'd sooner work with, Mr. Griscom," declared Jerry, with a look of admiration. "If you're down on this Flash, I'm with you—on one condition."

"What is that?"

"You want the boy. I want the girl."

"You soft-headed fool," retorted Griscom, looking at him contemptuously. "Fooling with girls is like picking up red-hot coals, I tell you that. I'd sooner work against ten men than one woman."

"Ragged Bess is my provender, anyhow. I'll take the risk."

"Be it so. Now go and get some dry clothes on. I'm staying at the Jolly Keg Saloon. You can find me there."

"All right," and Jacobs stalked away, the dirty water still dripping from his clothes.

"He's fool and coward at once," muttered Griscom, looking after him. "Yet I couldn't find a man to suit me better. Where his own miserable hide is safe he is ready for any rascally work. Now for my interview. It is an awkward job, and must be handled neatly and skillfully."

He walked up to the cottage, and looked slyly in at an open window.

"He looks like a hard chap to handle, if he's stroked against the grain," he decided. "But what is he at?"

The spy at the window looked more closely.

"There are papers in his hand. Old and faded ones. Yet his face has the look of one who cannot read them. Can they have anything to do with my quest? I should like to break in on him before he can hide those papers. But that wouldn't be safe with a man like him."

As he spoke he gave a ringing rap on the door.

Several minutes passed without a response, and he knocked again louder than before.

This time the door opened, and the weather-beaten face of Old Dug-Out appeared in the doorway.

He looked his visitor from head to foot with an inquiring glance.

"What's loose?" he asked. "I never twigged your phiz afore."

"I'm on the search for some mining information, and I've been told that you're the man for me to see."

"Me? 'Bout minin' and prospectin'? Wal, I do know summat 'bout that. But, who sent you to Old Dug-Out?"

"The landlord of the Jolly Keg, where I'm staying."

"That coon? Is he tryin' a lark on me? If he is, I'll bust his beer barrel. But, step inside. There ain't no harm having a chat, anyhow."

He withdrew from the doorway, and Griscom followed him into the house.

A long conversation ensued between the guileless old miner and his rogue of a visitor, on the question of the mining possibilities of the Payrock district. It is not necessary for us to repeat it, as it has nothing to do with our story.

A half-hour thus passed. The old man was very earnest, as he sat with his elbows on the table, answering his visitor's inquiries.

"Then you rarely think you won't settle down in this yere town?"

"Not if the court knows herself. From what you say, the claims are all staked out here, and no opening left for strangers. I must travel on to where there's a better outcrop."

"And you'll not be back this way ag'in?"

"Why, I'm kind of sorry for Payrock, but I'm afraid it will have to get along without me for the future. I've staked out my graveyard further on, and must keep moving toward it."

"You look 's if you mought go a good way 'thout reachin' it; but, nobody can't tell. Sudden death ain't unkimmon in these diggin's. But that ain't to ther point. I reckon as how you kin read 'ritin', Mr. Griscom."

"I don't brag on education," answered Griscom, laughing, "but I fancy I can do that much."

"I can't, more's the pity. I didn't have nary 'vantage when young, and I've handled ther pick 'stead o' ther pen ever since."

"I should fancy the pick would pay best out here."

"That's jist as luck has it. I've been peltin' inter the rocks fur twelve good year, and dug a hole you could hide a hull circus in, 'thout hittin' an ounce of ore. That's what ther pick's done fur me. But, once ag'in, that ain't to ther pint. I've got some papers here as I can't read myself, and thought as how mebbe you mought giv me the inwardness of 'em."

"Read them for you? Why, certainly. That's no more than one man ought to do for another."

"They're dokuments I've had on hand ther best end o' twenty year," said the old man, rising and walking to a chest at the side of the room. "I dunno as they 'mount ter much, but I'm kinder cur'us ter get at the inside of 'em."

He unlocked the chest as he spoke, and took from it a bundle of papers.

There was a repressed eagerness in Griscom's eyes as he followed the motions of the old miner. But he put on a careless aspect when Dug-Out turned to him with the papers,

"Ye'll promise ter keep secret what's in these dokuments? I've reasons why I don't want ther Payrockers to know 'bout 'em, jist yit. That's why I've axed you as a stranger ter read 'em fu'st."

"Why, as I expect to emigrate from Payrock before another day is over, I fancy I'm safe. I'll keep your secret, old man. You can trust me."

"That's clever," answered Dug-Out, with satisfaction. "Then here's ther dokuments. Peg inter 'em, and let me know ther signifercation."

He passed the papers to Griscom, seated himself again at the table with his face supported on his hands, and looked into his visitor's face almost as if he expected to read there the contents of the papers.

The documents were certainly as old as Dug-Out had said. They were yellow with age and the ink dimmed and faded, while some of them showed frayed edges and a splitting at the folds.

Griscom opened them carefully, one by one, and ran his eyes rapidly over their contents. He strove to keep his face steady and indifferent, yet could not quite prevent a look of satisfaction from showing in his features.

"I didn't ax you to read 'em to yerself, but to me," broke out the old miner, impatiently. "Come, squar' yerself, Mr. Griscom, and let out what's in 'em."

"I don't fully understand them," answered Griscom, in a quiet and careless tone. "Several of them are old letters, written to a Mr. Bernard of New York, many years ago. They don't seem to amount to anything particular. And here's a document that says Mr. Bernard and wife are about to start across the plains to California with their infant son."

"He had lost his fortune in the East, he says, and must seek a new one in the gold-mines of the West. Then, this last paper only tells who he is and where he came from. It seems intended to aid in placing him if anything should happen. Did anything happen to him?" he asked, with a show of curiosity.

"Why, yes; they got kinder rough-handled. Like some folks does on the peraries."

"In what way?"

"Had the'r ha'r lifted by a parcel o' bloody Injuns, that's all. Me and some o' the boys was prospectin' 'bout thar jist then, and stampeded them cut-throats. I giv a couple on 'em a passport to t'other world. But the Bernards—that's the name you said?"

"Yes."

"They was done fur; transmogrified inter ghosts, and the wagons set a-blazin'. But, ther' was a little youngster as the woman had in her arms and kinder kivered up. We stampeded them Injuns 'fore they could finish ther bloody work. I got the boy and the papers as you've jist read, and that's all that's left o' that thar wagon-train."

"The boy is still alive, then?"

"If you want ter stir up a livelier young hoss, you'll have ter foot the Rockies from end to end. Now read them papers out loud."

Griscom proceeded to do so, but we will not trouble the reader with a transcript of their contents. As read by him they showed nothing of importance other than to identify the Bernards and prove the parentage of the boy. There was nothing in his manner to indicate that he had not read them correctly or in full.

"That's the hull on 't?" queried Dug-Out, with some show of disappointment.

"Every word."

"They jist show who the boy's parients is?"

"Nothing more."

"And I s'pect 'twouldn't be no sort o' use sendin' to York to ax 'bout 'em? Like enough the lad's relations is all dead and buried afore now."

"Is the boy lively and happy?"

"You bet! Ther' ain't his beat on two legs."

"Then let him stay so. It would just worry and upset him to make him think he had relations in New York, and do nobody any sort of good."

"I don't see but you're 'bout right," assented Dug-Out, with a sigh, as he rose and took the papers from his visitor. "Ther' never was no use rakin' up dead chips. But I'm proper glad to know what's in them papers."

He replaced them in the chest and turned the key in the lock.

"And now, as you've made me dry with your documents, which are a little extra dry sort of fodder, I hope you'll treat me to a mug of cold spring water, by way of wetting my whistle again."

"Water!" cried Dug-Out. "Nobody drinks that here, 'cept as a rarity. I've got some good old rye that's much more to the pint. It's 'most as old as them dokuments, and a good deal ilier."

"No, no!" laughed Griscom. "I never touch whisky. Water's my drink."

"Then you wasn't brung up in ther mines," answered Dug-Out, reproachfully. "If ye're goin' to locate here, you can't begin 'arlier in gettin' the necessary eddication."

"No, thank you. Water, or nothing."

"I reckon you're yer own doctor," rejoined Dug-Out, as he picked up a bucket and walked to the door. "But water isn't quite our ideal of hospertality."

He disappeared with the bucket, closing the door behind him. Hardly had he done so than Griscom was on his feet, peering about him eagerly.

"The old fool!" he hissed. "If he knew the value of those papers he would sooner trust me with a gold mine than with them. I have but a minute. I must make the most of it."

He sprang to the window and looked out.

"All right. Yonder he goes. Now for that key."

Dug-Out, after locking the chest, had laid the key in a closet on the opposite side of the room. Griscom hurried there, threw open the door, and looked hastily for it.

But it had been placed somewhere out of sight, and it took him several minutes to find it.

Then, with an oath of impatience, he hurried across the room to the chest, inserted the key, and turned the lock. His nervous haste interfered with his movements, so that another minute passed before he had the lid lifted.

He had noted precisely where the papers were placed, and in an instant more had them in his grasp.

"It is only the inventory and will I need," he muttered. "Those he will not miss, and he is welcome to the others."

He sorted the papers over with nervous haste, and picked two out of the bundle. These he placed in his pocket and prepared to replace the others in the chest.

But all this had taken time—too much time



for the success of his scheme, as it proved, for at that moment the door opened, and Dug-Out reappeared on the threshold, pail in hand.

### CHAPTER III.

#### FLASH'S FLASH AND EXIT.

ONE glance sufficed for Old Dug-Out to take in the situation. With a roar like that of a buffalo bull he dropped the pail and sprung forward.

"Hound! Thief! Liar!" he yelled. "You are tryin' to steal my papers! You lied to me, then, you devil! You want a miner's lesson, do you?"

As he spoke, he flew across the room and aimed a blow with his brawny fist at the thief, who had risen hastily.

The blow would have felled Griscom to the floor had he not evaded it by a quick leap aside.

The next instant he sprung forward and in his turn aimed a blow at his antagonist, dropping the papers to the floor as he did so.

Dug-Out parried the blow and closed with his opponent.

They were now locked in a fierce struggle, staggering to and fro over the floor, and each doing his utmost to fling the other.

Powerful as Dug-Out was, Griscom was the better wrestler, and after a few minutes managed, by a sudden trip, to bring him to the floor.

But it proved easier to get him there than to get away from him. The old man had one arm free, and struck his opponent a violent blow in the face. With a fierce oath, Griscom drew a knife and brandished it over his prostrate foe.

"Villain!" shouted the old man. "You've got my papers; do you want to kill me, too?"

"I'll kill you like a rat, unless you lie still and let me tie your hands."

"Never!" screamed Dug-Out. "You've got the best on me now, but ther's help above, if ther's none below, and I'll never gup up to a bloody sneak-thief!"

At this instant the window was dashed in with a crash, and an agile, youthful form bounded in like a ball. It was Flash Lightning, whose sharp eyes took in the situation at a glance.

"There's help below, and don't you forget it," he cried, as, with a kick at Griscom's hand, he sent the knife flying across the room.

"You bloody dog! you'd kill the old man, would you?"

As he spoke, he tore Griscom from the veteran's form, hurled him violently to the floor, and knelt on his chest.

"Shall I smash in his face, daddy? Say the word, and it's done."

"S'arch him, Flash! I cotched him tryin' ter steal my papers. S'arch the hound!"

He held down the struggling villain while Flash thrust his hand into his pockets.

After a minute he drew out the papers which Griscom had filched.

"Here's two dokuments."

"Freeze onto 'em. Keep 'em fur me, Flash. I've lost my holt and ain't fit ter keep 'em. When I first come to ther Rockies, I—"

He was interrupted by a sudden commotion. In securing the papers, Flash had for a moment remitted his vigilance. Griscom took instant advantage of the opportunity. With a powerful surge he threw off his captor, sprung to his feet, and seized the knife from the floor.

Flash would have sprung upon him, but he was unarmed, and the knife was brandished in a threatening manner.

"Beware!" hissed the villain. "I owe you one, boy. I will repay you yet. Abel Griscom never forgets."

He sprung through the window as he spoke. Flash stood irresolute for an instant, then seized a pistol that lay on an open shelf and rushed after him.

"Don't shoot, Flash," cried the old man. "He ain't done nothin' as calls fur killin'."

"I'll fotch him up fur a thief, then," answered Flash, "and hand him over to mining justice at Payrock."

He leaped through the window, and could be heard in hasty flight outside. Dug-Out ran hastily to the door, seizing his miner's pick in his passage. When he got there Flash was already a hundred yards away, bounding like a young deer over the rough and rocky ground. No trace of Griscom was to be seen. He had got a good start on his pursuer.

The old man hurried after his protégé, but was soon left far in the rear by the youth's rapid progress. Soon Flash disappeared amid the hills and hollows of the rough surface. Dug-Out halted with a growl of displeasure.

"I'm afeard the boy'll git inter trouble," he muttered. "That Griscom's an ugly dog. He's

one as'd leave stick a man as a pig. I only hope the boy'll be judicious."

Flash was not judicious. In his fierce haste he quite overran the chase—for Griscom had halted at the first place of concealment, and lay in a lurking place in the rocks, with clasped knife and savage face, watching his young pursuer go by.

"Better for him, maybe," he hissed. "When it comes to pistol and knife, pistol don't always win the game. The boy's as alert as a leopard, and I'm glad he's gone."

A half-hour afterward Flash halted, somewhat blown with his sharp pursuit, in a strange and peculiar situation. He stood on the brink of an abrupt precipice, on the mountain slope, the rock descending vertically for some two hundred feet, while below lay a broad and deep pool of clear water—a mountain lake in miniature.

Behind him the hillside was covered with thick bushes. Before him, across the water, rose another, but not so steep, hill. From where he stood a broad view of the town and the surrounding country could be obtained.

"Hang the hound, he has given me the slip!" he cried. "I hardly thought a stranger could have distanced me anywhere 'round Payrock. It's as well, maybe. If I'd got hold of him, one of us might have been hurt."

He looked far and wide around him, with the hope of catching a glimpse of the missing man. As he did so, he was unaware of a stir in the bushes behind him, or of a spiteful and villainous face that glared, hyena-like, upon him from a leafy covert.

"A dangerous spot this," mused Flash. "One misstep and a fellow would drop out of life like a shot. The man that went down this fall would hardly get up again."

He looked down into the water, measuring the distance with his eye.

A flash of devilish malignity came into the face behind him. It was that of Jerry Jacobs.

"He dipped me into the frog-pond. I might souse him into this. Nobody'd be the wiser," was the murderous thought that ran through the brain of the low-browed villain.

"Ha!" cried the pursuer, looking far over the hills. "Is that my man?" He had caught sight of a distant form, which his keen young eyes, trained to mountain use, brought nearer.

Flash put his hand to his brow to shut out the glare, and looked again—utterly unaware of the fiend behind him, or of the stealing forward of an assassin.

"What's that?" cried Flash, as his quick ear caught a faint sound behind him.

Before he could turn, before he could think even, a pair of hands were laid on his shoulders, and a vigorous thrust given to his relaxed form.

"Pond for pond!" came the fierce words, as he yielded, toppled, and fell like a log down the sheer abyss.

The next instant but one man stood there—that of the would-be murderer, whose face had grown as white as the snow on the distant mountain peaks.

There came a sickening crash; then a loud splash in the water, as if the falling form had struck the rocks below, and bounded from them into the pool.

Jacobs stood there for a minute or two trembling like a leaf, burning to look down the precipice, yet held back by dread of the horrible thing he might see. Then he turned and fled into the bushes, like one pursued by the Furies.

Silence lay on that quiet scene—the silence of death and crime.

### CHAPTER IV.

#### A STERN CHASE.

ONE hour had passed after the crime at the cliff. In a secluded hollow in the foot-hills above Payrock sat the two precious villains, Abel Griscom and Jerry Jacobs.

Chance had brought them together on their retreat—Griscom from his lurking-place and Jacobs from the scene of his treacherous deed. They were earnestly conversing.

"I tell you this," Jerry was saying, "that Flash Lightning won't trouble you no more. He's gone off like a flash, and no thunder about it, either."

"I hope he has, for I hate the young hound," answered Griscom, savagely. "Not two hours ago he robbed me of a fortune. But I will have those papers again or the young whelp's life!"

And he gritted his teeth in fury as he spoke.

"His life you'll not get," said Jacobs.

"What! will you hinder me from taking it? Beware how you trifle with me."

"You can't take what he ain't got," answered Jerry, mysteriously.

"Ain't got? What do you mean?"

"Only that he's had a settler. His lightning won't flash in our eyes any more. He's as dead as a smoked herring."

"What do you mean, fool? It isn't two hours since he was chasing me over the rocks very much alive."

"He hadn't come across Jerry Jacobs then. Just now he's very much dead."

Griscom twisted himself around and looked the speaker sternly but curiously in the face.

"What do you mean?" he asked, curtly. "Explain."

"It's just about this size," answered Jerry, boastfully; "ever since the fellow flung me into the frog-pond I've been on the lookout to get even. Well, I met him upon the mountains there, a bit ago, and went for him like a hawk for a sparrow. We clinched and fit; fit like two wildcats for 'most half an hour. He fit hard, I'll say that, but he hadn't the stay in him that I had. I don't want to brag, but we was on the edge of a precipice, and he went over and smashed in his brain-pan. I stayed on top. That's the whole story."

Griscom looked at him with savage scorn.

"You infernal hound!" he hissed, "I'll wring your neck if you lie to me. You—cur! you wouldn't dare face a rabbit. How much truth is in this precious yarn?"

"If he didn't go over the cliff you may choke me. And I heard him batter ag'in' the rocks. If he ain't smashed into jelly I don't know beans."

"By Heavens! then you pushed him off. You wouldn't dare touch him, face to face." Griscom sprung to his feet. "Come with me. Show me this place. I must satisfy myself if you are telling the truth."

"No, no," protested Jerry, hanging back, while his face grew pale. "I daren't go near it. It's too horrible."

"Coward! you can murder a man, but you're afraid to face a corpse. Come, I say, or there'll be another murder."

He fingered his knife significantly.

"What do you want with him?" demanded Jerry, trembling like a leaf.

"I want those papers. He has them, and I'm bound to recover them if he is surrounded by a legion of ghosts."

He started over the rocks as he spoke, fixing his eyes on Jerry so significantly that the latter got up and followed like a whipped cur at his heels.

"Go ahead!" commanded Griscom, "Show me the way. Go on, I say!"

These last words were spoken with such vicious vim that Jacobs crept ahead, and led the way to the scene of the murder, trembling at every rustle of the leaves, and with a face as white as buttermilk.

Not another word was spoken till the vicinity of the rock-bound mountain-pond was reached. When near it Jacobs paused, trembling in such mortal fear that his teeth chattered.

"I daren't go nearer," he stammered. "If I saw that—that thing, I'd never sleep again. It was atop that hill we had the tussle. Down there he tumbled. You can guess what come to him 'fore he touched bottom."

"Liar and coward! did you push him over that hill?"

"I—I flung him over it."

"Braggart! you wouldn't have the heart to fling a dead limb over it."

At this instant the pair of villains were startled by a loud, clear voice that seemed to come from behind a great fragment of rock which lay in their path.

"He pushed me over, the craven-hearted dog! Now's my turn. If I don't get even with him, there's no rocks in Colorado," and there arose before them the vision of a tall, broad-shouldered youth, whose face burned with the fire of indignation. It was Flash Lightning, and very much alive.

A scream of terror burst from Jacobs's lips on seeing him, while Griscom shrunk back with an impulse of fear.

"A ghost! A ghost!" cried Jerry, turning and breaking into wild flight. "He's dead! I killed him! His ghost is after me!"

"A ghost! you chicken-hearted reptile! You'll see if I ain't a ghost in flesh and bone."

Jerry was now dashing wildly forward, falling, rising, scrambling, in mad haste to get from that dreadful spot.

In a moment more Flash was after him, running like a young deer, bounding from rock to rock, his face set with stern energy.

He quickly overtook the flying rascal, and



dealt him a kick that seemed to lift him into the air. Then began an exciting and ludicrous scene, Jerry flying and howling with pain and terror, Flash following and kicking with the vigor of a young colt, lifting his victim from the ground at every kick.

"I'm a ghost, am I?" he roared. "I'm a spirit? Then I'm a materialized one. See if that ain't flesh and blood!"

And he kicked Jacobs with a vim that sent him on hands and feet over a rock, rending his clothes in a dozen places.

Yelling, in wilder terror than ever, Jacobs bounded like a rubber-ball to his feet and dashed forward again, followed closely by his infuriated persecutor.

The chase had now brought them near to Payrock, and soon they were dashing through its principal street, affording an unusual spectacle to the inhabitants, who flocked from house, store and saloon to see the unwonted race.

Down the street Jacobs rushed, howling. Down the street Flash followed, kicking. Both were too preoccupied to see where they were or notice that a crowd of people were following them with shouts and laughter.

"Go it, spindle-shanks! Tally-ho!" cried one laughing townsman.

"Fetch him, Flash! Hi, hi, boy!" cried another.

"Five to one on Flash!"

"Done! Spindle'll wind him."

"There was a royal kick. He lifted him five feet that lick!"

"Bet you a pony it wasn't more than three!"

"They're heading toward the old quarry. They'll both go over."

"Hey, Flash, 'ware the quarry! 'Ware, lad, there's danger ahead!"

Such were some of the cries of the pursuing crowd, all of whose sympathies were with Flash, none with the terror-stricken wretch ahead.

But, deaf to it all, Jacobs dashed madly away from the supposed ghost behind him, and Flash kept furiously on his track, lifting him with his boot-toe at every ten paces.

And now, just before them, yawned the cavity of the disused quarry of which the townsmen had given warning—a sheer descent of thirty feet, near the road-side. In a minute more they stood on the dangerous brink. Here one last kick from Flash's foot lifted Jacobs into the air, and down he went like a shot into the quarry. Only the send-back from his kick prevented Flash from following him. He now stood on the brink, breathing heavily from his exertions, his face still hot with rage.

"What have you done, Flash?" cried the foremost townsmen. "You have killed the fellow."

"If I have, it's a good job," he fiercely replied. "There's no such good luck, hang him! The bushes have saved his ugly carcass."

It was as he had said. The disused quarry was grown up with a thicket of bushes, into whose midst Jacobs had fallen, and among which he was now scrambling, still wild with terror, and scratching his bared flesh till the blood trickled in a hundred rills.

"The poor devil! Let's get him out o' that."

"Leave him alone!" retorted Flash. "He has not got half what he deserved."

"By Jupiter! if I'd been kicked like him, I'd thought it fair play for murder," laughed one of the townsmen. "I never saw such a jack-rabbit chase in my life. What did he do, Flash?"

"Tried to murder me, the cur! He got behind me and pushed me off of Brown's Nose, into Ransom Pond below."

"The deuce he did! And you alive to tell it! Why, it's two hundred feet dead down, if it's a yard."

"There's something in knowing how to fall," answered Flash. "I struck the water feet first, and went down like a stone. Lucky it was deep there, for I must have gone fifty feet under water."

What Flash said may explain his marvelous escape. The crash which Jacobs had heard was that of a stone dislodged in the fall. Fortunately he had pushed his victim so hard that Flash's body shot out clear beyond the rocks and struck the water feet first as it happened.

He had risen and swum ashore safe and sound, and was resting there when the brace of villains came to seek him.

"Why, shoot it all, that means murder!" cried one of the townsmen, excitedly. "Do you pay a murder with a kicking? Let's lynch the hound, boys."

"Lynch him! Lynch him!" echoed others.

"Let him be," cried Flash, sternly. "He didn't hurt me. And he'll need a square yard of

plaster to mend his beam-ends after the kicking I gave him."

But the townsmen had now grown too excited to be easily quelled, and a rush took place around the edge of the quarry that promised ill-handling for the villain who had tried to murder the favorite of Payrock.

Fortunately for him, he had managed to scramble out of the bushes and was now in full flight again, his clothes torn into rags, blood flowing from a hundred scratches, sore as a boil with the savage kicking he had received, yet still full of terror, and convinced that the ghost of his victim was again close behind him. By the time the ministers of vengeance had reached the level of the quarry he was well beyond their reach.

"Come, lads," said Flash, somewhat recovered from his heat, "let's go back to headquarters and I'll tell you all about it."

He led the way back to the town, followed by a curious and amazed throng, many of them aughing still at thought of the peculiar chase.

## CHAPTER V.

### WHAT CAME OF AN AMBUSH.

In the green meadow-land about half a mile to the left of the town of Payrock stood a dwelling of much more pretension than the most of those in that locality. It was of frame, but handsome and roomy, with showy cottage gables and broad porches running around three of its sides.

This was the residence of Junius Melton, one of the richest "silver kings" in town and principal owner of the Atlas Mine, which was panning out splendidly.

Around the house was a luxuriant growth of shrubbery and flower-bushes, though on the side of the road lay an open lawn, which was kept very green and smooth.

Over this lawn, a few days after the events just described, walked Flash Lightning, looking spruce and handsome in his miner's dress, and with an erect attitude and self-poise of manner which gave him a striking appearance.

Linda Melton, the daughter of the owner of the house, and an old friend of the handsome youth, hastened gladly to greet him.

"Good-morning, Flash!" she cried, in a cheery tone, that showed they were the best of friends. "I am glad to see you."

She shook hands with him in a cordial manner.

"You don't see much to brag of when you see me," answered Flash. "One potato in a bushel don't count for much."

"But one swan in a flock of geese does," answered Linda, with a laugh.

"You're the swan and I'm the goose; or, maybe, only the gosling!" rejoined Flash, with an admiring look. "Is your father in, Miss Linda? I wanted to see him."

"No. He is down at the mine."

"Then I'll step over there."

"Don't be in a hurry. Your business can't be so urgent. Sit down here for a while. I want a chat with you."

They sat together on the steps of the porch, under the shadow of the embowering vines.

There was something neither of them had perceived. A lurking form had followed Flash as he approached the house, darting from tree to tree, and from bush to bush, on reaching the garden.

It was a small figure, which now lay hidden behind a clustering rose-bush, too far away from the speakers to hear more than an occasional word of their conversation. But had their eyes been keen enough to pierce the thick-leaved bush, they would have seen a pair of burning and flashing orbs fixed upon them, jet-black eyes that gleamed like diamonds, with an angry and revengeful fire in their depths.

All unconscious of this espionage, the conversation of the two continued.

They were a handsome pair as they sat there together, Linda in her light summer dress, and her face rosy with health; Flash with his rough pants thrust carelessly into his boots, his gray miner's shirt and belt, that revealed the lines of his fine figure, and his handsome young countenance, full of strength and intelligence.

"You will have your way," he answered, with a laugh, "so I judge I'll have to give in. You never let any one say no when you say yes."

"No one has a right to say no, when I say, yes," she gayly retorted. "How would the world ever get along if the ladies did not lead and the men follow?"

"That would be a good rule, if all the men were like that New York dude, Tim Spruce, who has a backbone about as stiff as a twine-

string; but it wouldn't work with all us Westerners. That chap wants baking over, for he came out all dough the first time."

"You are too hard on poor Tim," cried Linda, with a merry laugh. "He complains bitterly of your treatment. He says you call him a tenderfoot, and declares that he does not know what you mean, for his feet are not a bit tender."

"I'll tread on them the next time, and see."

"And he can't see why his collar and neck-tie grate so harshly on your feelings."

"Poor little dear! I try to let him alone, but I really can't. He's so awfully green and tender that I go for him like young asparagus."

"Beware, young man! Stir not his valiant soul to its depths, or he may go for you in return. He threatened vengeance the first time he finds you alone."

"Is that really so? How nice it is of him!"

"He intends to chastise you."

Flash broke into a jovial laugh.

"I see I'll have to carry a shovel around with me."

"What for?"

"To shovel up what's left of him when he's done chastising me."

While this chat was going on, the form behind the bush was seeking to creep to one nearer the speakers.

Quite unconscious of the spy's presence, the two continued their gay talk.

"Don't hurt him," pleaded Linda. "He really can't help it. We can't blame a man for being born a fool. It wasn't his fault. And then the poor little fellow is so sweet on me that I have a sort of tenderness for him."

"So! Is the wind in that quarter? Poor Tim! I'm sorry for him!"

"Well, that's certainly polite."

"He don't know you as well as I do."

"You are improving. When did I ever flirt with you? And yet," she continued, with a gay laugh, "it would be delightful to make Mr. Spruce jealous! We must play the lover the next time he sees us together."

"Why, if I knew how—"

"I'll teach you," she declared, still laughing.

"Hush! I declare, if he is not coming now. Sneaking on us, too. There's no better time for a lesson."

As she spoke, the young gentleman alluded to, Mr. Timothy Spruce, polished and brushed to the highest level of art, had made his appearance on the porch. On perceiving the couple, who sat on the steps, he suddenly stayed his progress and stood peering at Flash with a look, half-rage, half-fear. For, as we have seen, Flash had made him the butt of his jesting humor.

Then, gliding on tiptoe he managed to reach the cover of the luxuriant vines that grew up to the front of the porch, where he placed himself in an attitude to look and listen.

At the same moment the creeping figure in the grounds had reached the shelter of a nearer bush, and now was within easy hearing distance of the unconscious pair.

They were well aware of Tim's movements, but saw nothing of those glittering eyes that glared on them through the leafy bush.

Linda's form sunk downward, until it rested confidingly against Flash's strong shoulder. Her soft hand fell in a careless manner in his. He was not long in closing his fingers over it.

"Love in a cottage; it's a sweet dream," she murmured, bending her eyes on him with seeming tenderness, but with a roguish look which the eavesdroppers could not see. "What is money without love? What is not love without money?"

"Money has no charms for me," he replied.

"But this soft hand, and a heart like yours—But I fear you are playing me false. You love another. That jack-rabbit, Tim Spruce!"

"Love him? Love a tailor's walking advertisement! A perambulating specimen of shoe polish. No, never!—He takes. That hit him hard!"

Tim, who had been listening intently, drew back with a whitened face.

"If I thought you did I'd knot the fellow's necktie under his ear, and hang him up as a scarecrow to keep tramps out of Payrock.—That will fetch him, I fancy."

"It's you who are the gay deceiver," she retorted. "I have seen you sweet as sugar-candy on little Rags and Patches."

"Oh, I like Bess well enough—when you are not about. She's a jovial little thing. But, of course, dear Linda, when it comes to a question of love—" He finished the sentence with a look that set Tim frantic, while the form behind the bush sunk like a dead weight to the earth.



After some more of this artful conversation, the pair rose and walked away, hand in hand, repressing their laughter until out of hearing of their intended victim.

When Tim emerged from his concealment his face was red with repressed passion.

"Base ingrate!" he ejaculated. "I a tailor's advertisement! I a specimen of shoe-polish! I, who have moved in the best New York society, and am a scion of one of the best families! I will be avenged, bitterly avenged on them both. They shall see what a Spruce can do when his blood is up!"

And shaking his fist threateningly, Tim hastened across the lawn and out at the gate, blind with the rage that burned in his insulted soul.

Meanwhile the lurking form behind the bush had risen and crept away. On gaining the fields beyond the garden, the small figure ran wildly, with convulsed face, and wringing hands, until, stumbling in her flight, she fell to the ground, where she lay moaning and burying her fingers in the moist earth.

It was little Bess Martin. Bitterly had she paid for her jealous espionage on him she loved. She had been wounded to the soul by the thoughtless words spoken in ignorance of her presence. The arrows shot by the fun-loving pair had flown further than they dreamed of, and bitterly hurt one whom both of them would have grieved sorely to have wounded.

But the mischief was done, and Bess lay moaning like a stricken fawn, her heart too full for words. She had not known before how deeply she loved Flash. A few heedless words had taught her the lesson of a life.

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### A SCENE OF EXCITEMENT.

OUR scene now shifts to another locality near the village of Payrock. It is a wild spot, close by the mountains, and a mile or two from the village. The ground is rocky and broken, with a stream running down the face of the mountain-side, and falling in a cascade into the plain. Near by is a dilapidated frame house, that looks as if it might at any moment tumble into ruins.

This dwelling occupies a hollow near the hill-side. The ground rises beyond it, and then sinks away into another cavity, from which the house is quite concealed. This is a bushy region, well calculated to conceal those who desire to keep under cover.

At the moment of our approach there is a group of men in this second hollow. Two of them are persons whom we have already met, Abel Griscom and Jerry Jacobs. The remainder, who stand more in the background, comprise a half-dozen evil-faced fellows, several of whom look as if they would think no more of cutting a throat than eating a breakfast.

"This is the spot," announced Jacobs, in a cautious tone. "The old woman's hut is just over the hill. Here's where they come when they want to get out of reach of her tongue. I've watched them."

"And I can trust these good fellows?" asked Griscom.

"Bless you, they're good for anything, from robbing a tin shop to blowing up a mine-boss."

"Then lay your ambush. Hush! I hear voices now. Quick! we must not be seen."

"Don't forget that I'm to have the gal for my share of the profits."

"And I the boy, whom you didn't kill, for all your bragging."

"No, but he nearly killed me. He kicked me 'most into a jelly."

As they spoke the group of ruffians concealed behind the bushes, followed by Griscom and Jacobs, also disappeared into convenient lurking-places.

The voices that had been heard now grew louder. One of them was raised to a shrill, scolding tone; the other was much softer and lower.

"It's allers the way!" cried the first, in the voice of an old shrew, "allers gallervantin' and peramb'latin' round 's if you owned all Russhy, and leavin' me to work my fingers' ends off to keep ye."

"Why, Aunty," answered the voice of Bess, "I do everything you want me to; you know I do."

"'Cept when you ain't runnin' round the country with that lazy loon of a Flash. Drat his pictur', he's makin' a fool o' ye, gal."

"He ain't!" cried Bess with spirit. "You're always pickin' at him, Aunty; and you know that he ain't got his match in Payrock."

"Not as a big, skulkin, lazy lubber, I know he ain't. Jist you go on with that work, and

quit thinkin' 'bout him, or you'll hear from me mighty sudden."

A slam of the door accented these words. The next instant Bess appeared over the edge of the hill, looking very red and indignant.

"That's always the way! She's always pickin' at Flash! She knows it hurts me and she always does it on that account. I won't do nothin'! there! 'cept she lets him alone." She clinched her small fist and shook it toward the cottage, while her eyes flamed with indignation.

At this instant a new figure appeared over the brow of the hill, and came toward her at a rapid pace.

"Hillo, Bess! Who's been rubbing you the wrong way? Ain't had another set-to with the old woman, eh?"

It was the form and voice of Flash. He came up and put his arm familiarly around her waist.

She shook his arm off hastily and sprung to one side.

"Don't do that! I won't let you do that!" she cried.

"Don't do what? What's stung you, Bess? I don't hear hornets buzzing 'round here?"

"I've found you out, that's all," she cried, defiantly. "You've been foolin' me, lettin' on you cared for me, and you don't one bit!"

"Who told you that, Bess? Whoever did told you a lie as big as a meeting-house."

She looked at him through the screen of hair that fell over her flashing eyes.

"What'd you do to the chap that done it?" she asked.

"I'd kick him into the middle of next week!" declared Flash, in a tone of anger.

"Then you can kick yourself, for it was you that lied," she passionately replied. "You're all down on me, you, and Aunty, and that red-headed Melton girl, and I don't care whether I live or not. I've 'most a mind to go and drown myself, for I ain't no use here, and I'm in everybody's way."

"Why, bless your eyes, Bess, what's bu'sted? I thought this was brave little Betty Martin. You ain't going to play the grown-up baby, are you?"

"Not for you!" she declared, defiantly. "You've been treating me like a grown-up baby, and you sha'n't have another chance. There now!"

She jerked away from the hand with which he would have detained her, and ran impulsively away, looking back in angry reproach at him as she did so.

Flash stood in surprise that was almost consternation.

"Whew!" he whistled. "Here's a breeze! What under the sun ails the girl? I've seen a good many of her tantrums, but I never knowed her to go off quite so short as that before; and without anybody touching the trigger."

"Blame it all, it kind of upsets me. Something's put the mischief in the gal. But what makes her open on me! I ain't done anything to hurt her, and I won't stand it. If she thinks I'm that sort of a fellow, she'll find it's a big misdeal she's playing, that's all."

He turned and walked angrily away.

He had hardly gone before Bess made her appearance again. The expression of her face had greatly changed. She now looked contrite and full of self-reproach.

"Flash!" she called, softly. "Where are you, Flash?—Oh, he's gone, and I've driven him away! He'll never come back again! I could tear out my eyes for insulting him."

She flung herself passionately on the ground and buried her face in the grass.

"I wish I was dead!" she exclaimed. "There's nothin' to live for now. I've driven away Flash. He'll never look at me again. And there's nobody else in this world I care for, or that cares for me."

After a moment of this self-reproach she sprang to her feet with her eyes flashing with a new light.

"There! I am playin' the little fool again! He doesn't care for me. He's in love with that Linda Melton. The ugly thing! I could scratch her eyes out; and his, too!"

"That's right. Pelt it into him!" said a voice near her. "He's a low-down scallawag; a regular dead-beat. He's only playin' on you. I'm the only chap in these diggin's that loves you."

She started and looked round.

It was Jerry Jacobs who had spoken. He stood near, gazing on her with eyes of admiration. Her feeling again changed, as a look of scorn and anger leaped into her eyes.

"You love me? you—toad! You dare to run down Flash! If you were swelled up as big as an ox you wouldn't be as much of a man as

could be made out of his little finger. You'd best git away before he comes, for he won't leave a grease-spot of you next time."

"What! that skulking hound!" cried Jacobs, valiantly. "Why, the next time we come together, I'll let him see what a man of my sort can do."

"You'll show him how fast you can run," she added, scornfully. "You'd better, for there's frog-ponds and quarries around here too."

Jacobs strode forward angrily.

"Do you suppose I care for him? To prove I don't, I'm going to have that kiss that you owe me."

He caught her by the wrist as he spoke.

"I owe you a kiss?"

"Yes; and you shall pay it."

"Here it is, then."

She struck him in the face with all the strength of her strong young hand. Then tearing her wrist from his grip, she sprung away with a laugh of defiance.

Jacobs stood dazed for a moment, while his face blazed with rage.

"How do you like that style of a Rocky Mountain kiss?"

"I'll make you pay well for it, you vixen," he hissed, as he gave vent to a loud whistle.

Bess had sprung toward the bushes behind her. At the sound of the whistle three men leaped from the shelter of these bushes.

Two of them grasped her arms. The third, who held a muffling cloth, attempted to place it over her mouth.

He was not quick enough to prevent her giving one loud cry of alarm. Before she could repeat it her mouth was muffled so closely that she had hardly room to breathe.

"Away with the jade! Quick!" cried Jacobs.

"Two of you will be enough. The rest stay." Bess struggled with her captors, but she was as nothing in their hands. In a moment they had lifted her from the ground and were carrying her away.

The others returned to their place of ambush, and deep silence again fell upon the scene.

But the door of the cottage was heard to open, and footsteps to approach. The wrinkled face of a shrewish old woman appeared above the brow of the hill.

"You, Bet!" she cried loudly. "What are you yellin' 'bout now? Have you done that work I giv you? Drat the gal, she's gone ag'in, and never tetcht it! Won't I go for her when she comes back, the lazy young shrimp!"

After thus giving vent to her feelings the old virago withdrew. But, she had not fairly done so before a form appeared in another direction, and the nimble figure of Flash came bounding over the hill.

He looked on the apparently deserted scene in surprise.

"That was Bess's voice," he said. "And, she don't scream that way without it means something. What has happened to her? She don't seem quite in her sound senses to-day. I hope the little wildfire hasn't done herself a harm."

He advanced into the bushes. As he did so the whistle again sounded, and four strong men sprung suddenly upon him.

Flash was taken by surprise, and firmly grasped by his arms and shoulders before he fairly knew what had happened.

But he was not the kind of lad to submit quietly. He struggled fiercely with his captors, dragging them backward and forward over the grass, and making herculean efforts to escape.

"Scoundrels!" he hissed. "What is this for?"

They kept silent. It needed all their strength to hold their vigorous captive, and they had no voice for words.

For one moment, indeed, it looked as if he would escape. A powerful jerk had torn one arm loose, and his fist shot like a trip-hammer into the face of his strongest assailant, felling him to the ground.

Ere he could repeat the blow his arm was seized again, and at that moment a heavy stroke from a club fell on the back of his head, knocking him forward like a dead log.

It was Jerry Jacobs to whom he owed this blow.

"Tie him now, while his sense is gone. He's as strong and fierce as a young tiger," cried Jacobs. "Off with him! Don't let him escape, on your lives!"

They dragged their prisoner away, having first bound his wrists. He was so dazed with the blow that he could but fairly stand, and they had almost to carry him.

"Talk about the flash lightning of the Rockies!" declared Jacobs, scornfully. "I knowed I could fetch him when the Jacobs blood



got up. That pays off some old scores, Mr. Flash."

He followed the captors with their prisoner. They had not disappeared when the face of Mrs. Martin again peered over the hill-slope.

"There's queer noises here to-day," she said. "Ha! is that what's up?" she ejaculated, as she caught a glimpse of the group. "It's that chap Flash, and them fellers as has him is road-agents! What's they up to?—Mebbe they've took Bess, too!—She ain't the sort to yell that way fur nothin'. Bess took! Then I'll foller 'em till my feet wear out."

She turned back, snatched up her sun-bonnet and thrust it on her head, and in a moment put herself on the track of the ruffians and their prisoner.

She evidently knew something of scouting, for her movements were conducted with great skill and caution.

Soon the whole party disappeared over the hill-slope, and silence fell once more upon the scene of these exciting incidents.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AT A ROPE'S END.

WE introduce the reader to the interior of a strongly-built log-dwelling at a considerable distance from Payrock, and so cunningly concealed in a tree-lined cavity of the mountain-side as to render it very difficult to discover.

This dwelling is two stories in height, and with several rooms on each floor. The only room which gives signs of being occupied is a large one on the second floor, a room whose ceiling is crossed by a strong, broad-faced beam, that seems the main support of the peaked roof.

The group collected here is one in which we have just now great interest. In the foreground stands Abel Griscom and Flash Lightning.

Arranged around the room are the half-dozen of road-agents, each well-armed.

The prisoner is not confined in any way. His limbs are free and he stands erect and heedful, his alert eyes taking in the features of the situation. It is evident that escape is impossible. A movement toward door or window would bring him under the fire of six revolvers, held in sure hands.

Flash shrugged his shoulders carelessly. He was in for it, that was clear, and it was necessary to adapt himself to the situation.

He turned to Griscom, who was surveying him with a cold, significant look.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked Flash, in his most off-hand manner. "I got your invitation, and you see I'm here. I'm always on hand when I'm sent for."

"Yes, it appears so," rejoined Griscom, dryly. "You are a highly-accommodating young man."

"You turned up the trump card—the six of clubs," replied Flash, pointing to the road-agents, "and took my ace with it. But look out, Mr. Griscom. I'm one of the sort that's hard to take, and harder to keep."

"I fancy you're safe enough," remarked Griscom. "The six of clubs is a good holding card."

Flash looked at him from head to foot, as if trying to take in his measure. Then he fixed his eyes on one after the other of his guards, with a fiery glance that made some of them quail.

"A pretty half-dozen of cut-throats," he remarked, contemptuously. "And a fitting leader.—Well, I'm here now; what do you want with me?"

"In the first place I want that paper which you took from my pocket in Dug-Out's cottage. He left it in your care. You were a fool to take charge of anything quite so dangerous."

"I was, eh? And you've brought me here on account of that paper? Well, you haven't got it, and I'll bet you high you don't get it. What odds will you give?"

"Ten to one. I fancy that's a safe bet as the thing stands," answered Griscom, with a sardonic laugh.

"I'll take that bet," rejoined Flash, coolly. "And make it dimes, dollars, or eagles, as you please. Let's have a smoke on it. I never can do business without a cigar. You don't object to smoke in your parlor?"

"I fancy we can stand it."

"Then s'pose you join me in a weed. They are the best to be had in these diggin's."

He took a brace of cigars from his pocket as he spoke and handed one to Griscom.

The latter, who was evidently trying to be as cool as his prisoner, accepted the cigar with an air of carelessness.

"About that bet," resumed Flash, as he took

a match from his pocket and struck it on his boot; "shall it be dollars or eagles?—Drat that match! the brimstone's wet," he cried, as the match went out.

"Eagles, if you've got so much money to lose," said Griscom.

"Eagles be it, then, since I've so much money to win," laughed Flash.

As he spoke he was carelessly twisting something in his pocket. He now drew another match and struck it.

"I'm in sound earnest," he remarked.

"Which of these good fellows shall we make stake-holder?"

Griscom turned to the party of guards and surveyed them with a dubious eye.

As he did so, Flash drew a crumpled and twisted paper from his pocket, lit it with the match, and held its blazing end to his cigar.

"I wouldn't care to trust any of them with a big stake," remarked Griscom, turning back.

Flash laughed heartily, as he handed the blazing paper to Griscom, to light his cigar.

"Why, if it comes to that question, I wouldn't like to trust master or men too far," he said.

"You carry it off with a bold hand, young man," rejoined Griscom, angrily. "I fancy you hardly know the kind of man you are dealing with."

"I could make a shrewd guess," answered Flash, quietly. "You're not the first cut-throat I've seen. That kind sometimes get into Payrock—and they generally go out at the end of a rope."

"What, you young devil's cub!" cried Griscom, in a passion. "That to me? By the Lord, you want taming, and I'll tame you before I've done with you."

At this moment the blazing paper which he held burnt his fingers, and he threw it hastily to the floor.

"You won't find it so easy to tame the wild-cat of the Rockies," retorted Flash, defiantly.

"Flash Lightning is the worst thing in the world to hold, and I reckon you'll find that out before you're done with me. I fancy you hardly know the kind of man you are dealing with."

"There is enough of this," retorted Griscom, with growing anger. "Pass me over that paper instantly, or I'll take rougher means to get it."

"I'll change the bet, and make it ten to one on the other side that you don't get it," returned Flash with the same easy manner.

"This has gone far enough," exclaimed Griscom. "I didn't bring you here to play the circus clown. Search him," he said in a tone of authority to two of the men. "He has it about him."

Flash made no resistance, but stood with the same mocking smile on his lips as the men made a thorough investigation of his pockets and clothing.

"He must ha' flung it away, 'cause it ain't nowhere 'bout him," said one of the searchers.

"Or eat it," growled the other.

"Or burnt it, maybe," retorted Flash. "I judge if you've lost it, you've got nobody but yourself to blame," he remarked to Griscom.

"I did not burn a half inch of it. You settled the balance, except that little scrap on the floor."

Griscom gazed down in amaze and growing alarm to where Flash's hand was pointing.

"I calculate I've won that bet," continued Flash. "I handed you the paper. If you chose to burn it, that was your lookout, not mine."

With a deep oath of rage Griscom hastily stooped and picked up the blackened scrap of paper. He quickly opened it, and cast his eyes over the few words that were still legible.

As he did so his face grew purple with rage, and an exclamation of fury came from his lips.

"You imp of Satan!" he yelled. "You want it then! By all that's good you shall have it! I'll show you if Abel Griscom is the man to play off your tricks on."

"That's not the only trick I know," retorted Flash. "I'll show you another yet."

The enraged villain turned and spoke a few words to his ruffianly companions.

In response they seized Flash and bound him hand and foot, his wrists being tied with a small but strong cord in front of him, which was drawn so tightly that it cut deep into the flesh.

More ominous proceedings followed. One of the men produced a long rope, in the end of which was a running noose. This was placed around the neck of the captive, while the other end of the rope was thrown over the beam that ran across the room several feet over their heads.

Flash turned a shade pale at these ominous preparations. But beyond this natural show of feeling he gave no sign of fear and flinching.

"Up with him!" cried Griscom, in a tone of fury.

"Nary time, boss," replied one of the men. "We never scrag nobody without having a con-fab over it fu'st. That's one of our rules."

Griscom looked at him threateningly, but the man stood firm.

"Very well, if you want to talk," he remarked. "Fasten the end of the rope, so that the fool will throttle himself if he tries to get away. Now, young gentleman, if you want to play flash lightning it's your chance while we're away. When we come back you will likely have a chance to dance in the air."

"What's to come will come," answered Flash defiantly. "I never go to meet trouble."

"I should advise you to say your prayers, at any rate. If you've got any last wish now's the time to speak it out."

"Nothing except to finish my cigar, if you'll be sociable enough to give me a light. It has gone out, and I never like to leave a job half done, or a cigar half-smoked."

Griscom stared.

"Well, you're a cool one," he muttered. "But you may have that much satisfaction, if it will be any good to you."

He struck a match, and held it to Flash's cigar. A few puffs and the tobacco was burning again.

"That's prime. Good-day," he said. "Come back soon, or I won't promise to wait for you."

Griscom looked at his cool prisoner again, and muttered an oath. Flash was a little too much for him. He led the way to an adjoining room.

"You can have five minutes to finish your smoke," he said, as he closed the door.

"That'll be plenty," answered Flash. "And if you find me here when you come back you can hang me for a fool," he added.

Listening a moment to make sure that no one had stayed within hearing, he began to twist his arms, and after a few seconds succeeded in getting his bound wrists in front of his face.

Then puffing furiously on his cigar he quickly had the burning end of it in a red coal of fire.

A minute more sufficed to bring the slender out strong cord that constricted his wrists in contact with the glowing end of the cigar.

It smoked an instant, and then burst into a blaze. Only a few seconds were needed to burn through its strands; the cord parted, and Flash's hands were again free.

"The blind fools!" he ejaculated, as he threw the noose from his neck. "I told them they did not know the man they were dealing with, but they would not believe me."

In another instant he had drawn a knife from his pocket and severed the cords that bound his ankles. He was a free man again.

With light but rapid steps Flash made his way to the window. Here he paused and thought.

"No," he said, "they are trained bloodhounds. They know the ground and I don't. They will run me down in ten minutes. It is better to trick them than to run from them."

He looked inquiringly around the room. A flash of intelligence came into his eye.

"I have it," he said.

He raised the window and threw the shutter wide open. Then turning he grasped the rope that lay over the beam, and climbed it hand over hand.

This brought him quickly to the level of the beam. It was, as we have said, very wide, and when he had stretched himself out flat on it he was quite concealed from below.

"One thing more," he muttered.

He took a bit of paper from his pocket, wrote on it hastily with a pencil, and then let it flutter down to the floor.

This was hardly done before a sound at the door showed that the ruffians were returning.

Flash sunk down and lay quiet. The door opened.

"Now, my brave fellow," said Griscom as he entered, "are you ready for your dance—Hil-lo! The deuce! what does this mean?"

"He is gone!" cried the man behind him.

The others sprung into the room. They were all stupefied with surprise.

"The window!" exclaimed one. "He has gone that way!"

At this instant Griscom perceived the scrap of paper on the floor. He snatched it up and ran his eye hastily over it.

"I'm off for Payrock," he read. "I'll see that there are ropes enough ready for the whole gang when you come there to call on me."

"See here," cried one of the party, picking up the burnt twine. "He has burnt himself loose with the cigar you lit for him."



A fierce oath broke from Griscom's lips. He had been utterly fooled, and by a boy at that.

"After him!" he shouted. "You are all old scouts. You can run him down. After him! Don't lose a second. And when we catch him, we'll hang him on the spot. He shall see if he can play with Abel Griscom."

He then sprung to the door and rushed through it. The others followed with equal haste. In a moment they were all gone, and no one remained in the room but the silent figure on the beam.

Flash had protruded his head, and was looking after them with laughing eyes and a gesture of contempt.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

FLASH remained in his covert until the sound of voices outside had died away in the distance.

Then he half-rose on the beam, and was on the point of letting himself down by the aid of the rope to the floor, when sounds in the other part of the house made him pause.

Footsteps were evidently approaching. He dropped down on the beam again and waited. In a moment more these steps entered the room. He had crouched down so closely that he could see nothing, and had to trust to his hearing.

But the quick, light tread of one pair of feet gave him a start.

He was sure he had heard that step before. He received a greater start from the first words that met his ears.

"What did you bring me here for, you mean, low-lived atom of a man?"

The voice was that of Bess Martin, raised to tones of fiery indignation.

"Now, see here, gal, don't you go and get me worked up. I'm a terror when I'm worked up."

It was Jerry Jacobs that spoke.

"A terror to mice, maybe; but not to men. You had to get a gang of bloodhounds to carry off one poor girl! You ought to call yourself a man, oughtn't you, now?"

"I wouldn't like to carry you off alone," retorted Jacobs, with a provoking laugh. "It would be worse than carrying a wildcat."

"I'd scratch your eyes out, you sneak, if you tried it!" exclaimed Bess, in a white heat of rage.

Flash now had his face over the beam, looking down on the indignant girl with eyes that beamed with admiration.

When they fell on Jacobs this look changed to an ominous threat. Flash caught hold of the hanging rope, and began cautiously to draw it up.

"Go on, my little beauty!" said Jacobs, approvingly. "I like that. You are never so pretty as when you are mad."

"I wish Flash was only here!" cried Bess. "If he'd only show his face you'd wilt like a dead leaf, you coward!"

"Him! That rock-hopper! That blowing baby! Why, gal, the last time I saw him I knocked him out cold, and he never lifted a finger. That's what I care for him!"

He snapped his fingers defiantly.

If he had seen the look that was fixed on him from above he would not have been so brave.

"You knock him!" she ejaculated, contemptuously. "You must have done it with a club from behind."

Jacobs winced at this. She had stumbled too near the truth for his liking.

"Your Flash!" he continued, with a look of assumed scorn. "Why doesn't he come to help you if he is so brave? He is a good deal nearer you now than you think. Why, gal, he could almost touch you."

"That's a lie. If he were that near, he'd be on you like a catamount. Where is he?"

Flash had drawn his head hastily back, fearing he was discovered.

"Near enough to hear every word we're saying. We'll see now if he comes to your help while I'm taking that kiss you owe me."

He failed to see the threatening dumb play that was going on over his head. Flash looked down again at these words, and shook his fist furiously as he opened a larger noose in the rope.

"You lie!" exclaimed Bess, passionately. "If Flash heard you now, there's not a lock in the house would hold him."

"I tell you he isn't ten feet away. Now let us see if he robs me of my kiss again. I only wish he was right here to see me take it."

He caught Bess in his arms and attempted to

press his lips on hers. She pushed his head away and fought him fiercely, but after a moment's struggle he caught and pinioned both her arms in a strong grasp.

Exhausted with the fierce struggle, she lay for the moment listless in his power.

A laugh of triumph broke from his lips.

"So-ho, my lively beauty!" he exclaimed. "Where's your Flash now? Why don't he come when he's wanted?"

Their struggle had brought them directly below the point where Flash lay on the beam with the rope in his hands.

As Jacobs advanced his head to snatch the desired kiss there came a sudden drop of the open noose. It fell over his head and down around his body. The next moment it was drawn tight and Jacobs was a prisoner, to his utter surprise and consternation.

"You called for me. Here I am. Anything more you want done?" queried Flash, as he dropped nimbly to the floor.

"Flash!" screamed Bess, in a tone of delight, rushing into his arms. "Oh, Flash! Is it you, indeed?"

"Pinch me, and see, Bess. It feels like me, don't it? I'm always on hand when I'm wanted. —So, my jolly blade, what have you got to say for yourself now?"

Jacobs had crouched down as far as the rope would let him, while his face was a picture of astonishment and dread.

Flash walked around him, surveying him as one would a menagerie specimen.

"What shall we do with him, Bess?"

"He ought to have the rope around his neck instead of his arms."

"Good! He knocked me down with a club. I'll hang him up like a smoked ham."

"Oh, good Mr. Flash! Oh, kind Mr. Lightning!" cried Jerry, wringing his hands in dismay. "Don't hang me, please don't! I was only in fun. I only wanted a little fun."

"Oh, then we'll hang you only a little—only for fun. You're so fond of fun that you won't mind five minutes of it, I know."

"Mercy, dear Mr. Lightning! You don't know how it'll hurt. Five minutes! Oh, please let me go!"

"Then s'pose we say three. Just a little swing, you know; only for fun."

"You wouldn't hang me only 'cause I wanted a kiss?" pleaded Jacobs.

"What do you say, Bess?"

"Make him get down on his knees and beg pardon and say that he's a sneaking coward."

"I'm a sneaking coward; everybody knows that," pleaded Jacobs, pitifully.

"And deserve a good kicking."

"I deserve a good kicking," rejoined the miserable captive.

"Good! But he tried to kiss you," declared Flash. "He's got to be punished for that."

"But I didn't kiss her. She wouldn't let me. Oh, don't hang me, Mr. Flash!"

"All right. I'll only truss you up a little, and leave you to your meditations. There's many a slip 'twixt kiss and lip. You can study that out, Mr. Jacobs."

He caught the other end of the rope, and with Bess's help drew Jacobs up until his feet were clear of the floor, the rope tightening around his body and arms. He hung dangling in the air, pitifully groaning and lamenting.

Jacobs continued his prayers and groans, but no attention was paid to them. Flash fastened the end of the rope again and left him swinging under the beam.

"Now we've got to glide, Bess, before that other gang comes back."

Bess was darning with something of her old wild humor round the swinging captive and snapping her fingers in his face.

"So, Mr. Girl-stealer, you want a kiss from Bess Martin! and don't care one bit for Flash Lightning! How do you like it now? Don't you find it splendid taking a swing?"

"Let me go! I'll never do it again!" pleaded the captive, in a tone of supplication.

"Why, it's too lovely. I wouldn't for anything rob you of your swing. It's ever so much nicer than kissing."

"Come, Bess, we must make time," called Flash.

"Gracious! There they come now!" exclaimed Bess, looking from the window.

"By Heaven, you're right!" cried Flash springing to her side. "It's too late to run. We've got to fight."

He sprung hastily to the door, closed it and shot the bolt into its socket. Meanwhile, Bess, who was a ready hand in an emergency, was searching the room.

"Here's a lot of guns!" she cried, throwing

open a closet. "A half-dozen of them! —loaded, too."

"Good for you, Bess. You're worth your weight in gold. Hand them out.—Here come the rascals."

Some one without tried to open the door, jerking at it furiously when it failed to yield.

"Who the deuce is in there?" came an angry voice.

"Your prisoners!" yelled back Flash. "Ain't you glad you've got 'em?"

"Open, or we'll break the door down!"

"Ain't this splendid!" cried Bess, dancing in her excitement. "Shall I shoot him?"

"No. Wait till I give the word."

"Then I'll fasten the shutter."

"Don't go near it," cried Flash, in alarm. "They might shoot through it."

"They'll climb into it," declared Bess. "It's got to be shut."

"Wait. I have it. We'll close up the window and give them a target."

He loosened the rope and lowered Jacobs to the floor.

"I'm ever so much obliged, Mr. Flash. You're going to let me go, ain't you?" asked the half-strangled captive.

"Oh, yes! Through the window. Here; climb into it."

"But you've got the rope on yet. I can't."

"We'll see. Bess, take aim at him. If he don't climb, you shoot."

"Won't I, though!" cried Bess, with a reckless laugh.

"No, no! Oh, don't shoot! I'll climb. I'll do anything if you don't shoot!"

The window was narrow, and Jacobs's form fit tightly into it. When he was half through Flash caught and fastened the other end of the rope.

"Hang there, now. If your friends outside want something to shoot at, you'll make a good target. If you try to get back, we'll riddle you."

A roar of fear and rage came from Jacobs, whose legs hung inside the window, while the rest of his body had disappeared.

While this was going on there had been silence outside. The villains were in consultation.

Soon there came another thundering knock.

"Open, or we'll break it in."

"Break, and be hanged!" yelled back Flash. "We'll shoot you through the window."

"If you do, you'll hurt one of your own scarecrows."

This threat brought a yell of fear from Jacobs. He tried to draw back, but Bess prodded him with the muzzle of a rifle, and he hastily jerked out again.

The voices ceased outside for a minute. Some of the villains had evidently been investigating.

Then the pounding on the door was resumed, and pistol-shots were heard, as if they were seeking to fire through the stout timber.

"That's waste lead," cried Flash. "Be ready, Bess. You are not afraid of a rifle?"

"Not much; you ought to know that," she replied, bringing the piece to her shoulder.

"If they come in, fire into the crowd. We can bring down two, and then go for the guns behind us."

"I'm not afraid of them," declared the girl, bravely. "I can fight, if I have to."

Further words were interrupted by a crashing sound at the door. Something had given way, and the door flew open.

In rushed the villains, to be checked by the vision of the brace of rifles that stared them in the face.

"Down with them! Fire!" yelled Griscom.

Crack! crack! went the spiteful revolvers, but their sound was lost in the louder crash of the rifles.

Two of the villains fell, Flash and Bess, who were unhurt by the pistol-shots, dropped their empty rifles and turned to seize two of those that stood by the wall behind them.

But before they could use them Griscom rushed forward, flinging his revolver as he did at the head of the young champion.

Flash dodged it, but his foot slipped, and he went down on one knee. Ere he could recover or bring his rifle to an aim, Griscom was on him.

Meanwhile Bess had fired again, but somewhat wildly. The next instant one of the ruffians had caught her, and held her fast by the arms, despite her vigorous effort to escape.

Griscom had brought Flash to the floor by his spring. A severe struggle began, which was quickly ended by two of the ruffians coming to Griscom's aid.

In a minute more Flash was a bound captive



again. The released prisoners had not taken proper advantage of their opportunity, and they were once more in the toils of their foes.

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### MOLLY MARTIN SHOWS HER METTLE.

CRITICAL as was the position in which we have just beheld our principal characters, we must leave them awhile and take up another thread of the story of that day's doings.

We have told how the cross-grained old shrew, Molly Martin, had put herself on the track of the ruffians and their prisoner. In spite of her abuse of Flash, she had a secret liking for him, and she tracked his captors as faithfully and cautiously as any trained scout could have done.

Two hours afterward the old shrew made her appearance at the cottage of Dug-Out, her face red, her hair disheveled, her whole aspect presenting signs of haste and weariness.

The old miner was seated at his house door, taking an afternoon smoke, while his hands were busy on some household labor.

"Hello, old woman!" he shouted. "What's up? You look 's if somebody been hustlin' you through briars. Ain't been havin' no set down with nobody, hey?"

"You're wanted," she cried, breathlessly.

"What fur? Ain't nothin' bad come ter Bess, hey?" he demanded, taking the pipe from his mouth.

"I'm 'feared so. I know ther' is to that scape-grace o' yourn."

"What! Flash?" cried the old man, dropping his work and springing to his feet. "Blazes! what is it, old 'oman? Flash! Good Lord save us! why don't you let it out?"

"I will when you giv me an openin'," she shrewishly replied, dropping into the seat he had vacated.

"Oh, come, Molly Martin, don't you see I'm b'ilin' over? Let it out short, old 'oman, and I'll giv you a dollar a word."

"It's road-agents," she said. "Dunno what th'er' up to, but they've snatched him, and—"

"Road-agents! Hold on!"

He rushed into the house, and came out in an instant, rifle in hand, his face red with excitement.

"Who are they? Where are they? Do you know them?" he ejaculated, as he examined his weapon.

"Why, you're wuss nor a baby three months old," said Mrs. Martin, contemptuously. "Jist bridle yer tongue, and I'll tell ye somethin'. If you don't shet up I'll slide."

"Go ahead," he replied, more humbly. "Go ahead. I'm listenin'."

"If you say another word I'm off. They was road-agents. I see'd 'em snatch him, and I folloed 'em."

"You—" began Dug-Out, but checked himself at the flash of the old woman's eye.

"I treed 'em, too. Run 'em down, and come back here arter help."

"But—" he began, and again checked himself.

"Ther' was a good half dozen of 'em. I want you to rouse up some of the miners and fotch 'em here, and I'll show ye the spot."

"Yes, and—"

"If ye let one word more out o' yer talk-trap I'll go home and finish my washin', and ye kin find 'em yer own way. You go fur help, and I'll rest, fur I'm clean pucker'd out."

Dug-Out looked as if he would have liked to ask some more questions, but the face of his visitor was so full of spiteful vim that he dared not speak. Flinging the gun over his shoulder, he hurried off toward the town, leaving her to the rest she needed.

"That's jist like men," she soliloquized. "They allers want to do all the talkin'. Women don't have no chance ter git a word in edgewise, 'cept they choke it in, like I jist did."

With a squeaking laugh of triumph, she stretched herself on the bench, and quietly awaited the coming of the rescue party.

An hour passed before the old miner reappeared. He had made good use of his time. There followed him five or six stalwart miners, all well-armed, and with faces full of resolution.

The mere hint of danger to Flash would have roused the whole town to his rescue, for he was a universal favorite. But at that time of day most of the people were engaged, and he contented himself with the few he found at leisure.

By this time Mrs. Martin had recovered from her fatigue. She was wiry and capable of great exertion, and was quite ready again for another long tramp.

Her temper had also become somewhat mollified, and she did not object now to tell the circumstances of the day's adventure.

The story excited her listeners greatly. They grew eager for the road, and were full of deep threats of vengeance on the villainous gang.

"I reckon that's 'bout enough talk," she finally declared, in a decided tone. "Work's the next thing to be did, and ther' ain't no time to lose. Foller me, and I'll fotch ye to ther spot."

She set out at once, leaving them to follow as they pleased. She had said her say, and not another word could be got from her during the journey.

With lips shut like a steel-trap she led on at a pace that kept them busy to follow her. The old lady was showing her mettle in a way she would hardly have got credit for.

Soon they had disappeared in the distance, and the cottage of Dug-Out remained deserted.

But, leaving them to their journey, we must return to the captives, whom we last saw prisoners in the hands of Griscom and his gang.

Since we left them, a marked change has come upon the situation.

Flash is again bound, the rope being placed again over the beam, and one of the party stands with the noose in his hand ready to throw it over the head of the prisoner.

Jacobs, who has been set free, is grasping Bess firmly by the wrist, with a look of malicious triumph on his face. The tables have been turned very much to his satisfaction.

Griscom stood contemplating his captive with a look of cold-blooded determination.

"You thought you were playing a smart dodge in destroying that paper," he said, coldly. "Do you know what that document was, and what you have really done?"

"I never was good at guessing riddles," answered Flash.

"It was good for a fortune of two hundred thousand dollars, which has been waiting for a claimant ever since the death of your father and mother. If I had gained that paper I would not have cared what became of you. It would have served my purpose, which is to handle that fortune. Without the paper I cannot handle it safely while you are living. So you have signed your own death-warrant."

"That's the game is it?" rejoined Flash. "I'm glad the cat's out of the bag. That's very useful information."

"It won't be of much use to you. These good fellows would have given you your life; but since you've played them that trick, and put bullets in two of them, you've cut off your last hope. You've got to hang."

"What'll you bet on that?" demanded Flash easily. "I'm ready to take odds you don't hang me."

"There's been enough of this nonsense," rejoined Griscom angrily.

He turned and spoke to the men, who had been standing by with grim faces and merciless looks.

Instantly the one with the noose dropped it over Flash's neck, drew it tight around his throat, and adjusted the knot.

At this moment there was an unlooked-for diversion. Bess had been listening to the conversation with heaving breast and flashing eyes. But she had remained silent and motionless, as if recognizing that words from her would be useless.

Now, with a sudden jerk, she tore her wrist from Jacob's grasp, and flew to the rescue of her lover.

"You shall not hang him!" she cried. "He has done you no harm! You shall not hang him!"

As she spoke she clasped him closely in her arms, and strove to tear the noose from his neck.

This she was prevented from doing by the man who stood beside him.

"Oh! let him go!" she pleaded. "He is so young and strong and handsome! And he is the only one in the world that cares for me! Oh! let him go!"

"Take her off!" commanded Griscom, unmoved by her appeal.

Two of the men seized her and tore her loose from the prisoner.

She broke away from them and threw herself at Griscom's feet.

"Oh, don't hang him! don't hang him!" she pleaded. "He is all I have in the world; the only one I love in the world! Oh, for my sake don't hang him!"

"You don't deserve this girl if you can't take better care of her," said Griscom, coldly, to Jacobs.

At this hint Jacobs seized her and tore her away, holding her too firmly to again escape, though she struggled desperately in his grasp.

"Don't mind me, Bess, I ain't worth it," said Flash. "This hound has the whip hand now, but he's got Old Dug-Out to deal with yet."

"Oh, it's too dreadful!" she writhed with agony. "It will kill me! It will kill me!"

"Swing him off!" cried Griscom. "Don't mind that baby of a girl. We'll see what Old Dug-Out will do."

Two of the men seized the rope, and were on the point of hauling the captive from the floor when there came a new diversion.

A sound at the window drew all eyes in that direction. What they saw there was a wrinkled, weather-beaten face, full of fierce resolution; and the protruding muzzle of a rifle.

"You want ter see what Old Dug-Out can do. Here's what," came the harsh voice, and simultaneously the rifle cracked with a sharp report.

The men at the rope hastily loosened their hold, as the singing bullet whizzed between their hands.

Ere the villains could recover from their astonishment, Dug-Out was through the window and on the floor.

At the same moment the door of the room flew open, and Mrs. Martin rushed in, followed by a group of armed and stalwart men.

Only one thing met the old woman's eyes. There was her niece struggling in the grasp of a man. With a yell of rage she flew at Jacobs, caught him by the hair, and began to pummel him with a vim that she would hardly have been thought capable of.

Meanwhile Dug-Out had rushed forward to Flash, thrown the rope from his neck, and cut the cords that bound his hands.

"Good!" cried Flash. "I offered to bet him odds that he wouldn't hang me. Where is he? Hillo!"

He had just caught sight of Griscom climbing through the window.

He flew to stop him, but was too late. The villain had escaped. One of the miners sprung there with his rifle, but could see nothing at which to shoot. The fugitive had dodged under cover. The miner sprung through the window and rushed in pursuit.

Meanwhile Bess had again clasped Flash in her arms like a recovered treasure, and was weeping tears of joy over him; Mrs. Martin was still pummeling her helpless foe, and the road-agents were crouching in dread before the rifles of the miners. The tables had been decidedly turned.

#### CHAPTER X.

##### LOVE AND JEALOUSY.

WE must go forward several days from the period of our last scene. A few words will suffice to tell the outcome of the situation in which we left our characters. Griscom, as we have seen, had escaped. As for the road-agents whom the miners had captured two of them, who were recognized as notorious desperadoes, had been hung on the rope which they had provided for Flash.

Jerry Jacobs only escaped the same fate at Bess's solicitation. Instead of hanging him, they gave him a good twenty-five with a rope's end, and let him go, as of too little account for further trouble.

The others were brought to Payrock and lodged in the lock-up, until it could be decided what should be done with them. Two of them were wounded—one seriously, the other slightly.

Such was the state of affairs a week after the events narrated. Our story now brings us back to a familiar scene, the exterior of Dug-Out's cottage, where we find the old man seated on his favorite bench. He has in his hand the documents which Griscom had pretended to read for him.

Before him stands Bess Martin, looking very quiet and sober for her. She seems to have just heard a surprising communication.

"You ain't sure?" she asked anxiously.

"Dead sure. It's down in black and white in these yere dokuments. I jist got that rabbit-faced dude, that's dawdlin' arter Lindy Melton, to read 'em, and he giv me the real gist on 'em. I tell yer, Flash is a gentleman born, and is got a big fortun' waitin' fur him."

"That's what that chap Griscom said, when he was going to hang him," rejoined Bess, gloomily. "I'm ever so sorry."

"Sorry, gal? What fur? Sorry 'cause Flash is got a fortune comin'?"

"He'll never have nothin' to do with me ag'in," she sadly answered. "A little ragged



nobody like me. Look at me! How'd I look 'longside a rich gentleman?"

She burst into a reckless laugh, and flung herself away impetuously.

"Come back yere, gal!" cried Dug-Out, commandingly. "What's all this about? Yer don't mean to say as Flash is puttin' on airs, do ye?"

"Tain't no matter. He's too big fur me. I don't want nothin' more to do with him, and I won't look at him again."

"Don't be a fool, gal. The boy can't help havin' a rich daddy. If he on'y keeps his level, that's the main p'int. The young scamp, if he goes back on you, I'll—"

"What?" she asked, anxiously.

"I'll burn these dokuments, and let him whistle fur the fortune."

"Oh, no, don't do that! I'd never forgive myself if you did that! Never mind me. I ain't no account. I'm only little Rags and Patches. Flash is too good for me every way."

"No, he ain't. And if he goes back on you, he'll hear somethin' from Old Dug-Out. Tell you what, gal— If I tell you a great secret, you won't let it out, will ye?"

"No," she replied. "Nobody shall hear it from me!"

"It's jist this, then: Everybody knows how I've been diggin' inter the rocks fur twelve year, and ain't struck pay-rock yit. They laugh at me fur a crook. Mebbe they'll find out that the old man knows a thing or two. I struck fu'st chop signs yesterday. If I ain't mighty mistook, I'm nigh onto gold."

Bess sprung up and clapped her hands joyfully.

"Oh, that's too good! I've been prayin' you'd do it. I'm comin' in the mine to-morrow, to bring you good luck."

"But that ain't the p'int yet, gal. If I strike it I'm goin' ter make you as rich as Flash, an' dress you up tasty an' guv you an eddication. Then if he goes back on yer, I'll break his ugly young neck."

"You sha'n't do it," she cried, starting away impetuously. "I won't rob you. And if he won't have me as I am, I won't have him! I can be proud, too."

"Lord, what a queer thing a gal is!" exclaimed Dug-Out. "She don't want him with money, and she don't want him 'thout money; but all ther time she wants him somehow. It's lucky as Flash's pure grit. Ther' ain't no danger o' him goin' back on ye, Bess. I didn't fotch him up that way."

"He's in love with that ugly, proud Linda Melton!" cried Bess, flinging herself away testily. "I've seen him. 'Cause I wear old clothes and don't put on airs he's dropped me and picked up that jilt. He's just makin' fun of me, and I won't speak to him again, there!"

She flung her torn hat to the ground, and tossed her head defiantly.

"Highly, tighty, gal! What's this about? Marcy take us all, are you gone daft?"

"There they come now. I won't stay. I know they're just makin' fun of me and I won't stand it. Jist you watch 'em and you'll see."

She ran hastily away. Dug-Out looked round him, and then withdrew into the house, as if curious to see what would take place.

The next minute Flash and Linda appeared on the scene, walking slowly and engaged in earnest conversation.

"You say he is furious?" remarked Flash.

"Wild. He would eat you without mustard. He vows deep vengeance."

"Good! We must work him up worse yet. Hal! Don't look round. He's after us now. I just caught a glimpse of him behind the bushes yonder."

"Following us!" she cried, with a flash of anger. "Then he wants punishment. I feel like teaching him a lesson."

"And I too," laughed Flash. "There, he has hid behind that big tree near the corner of the house. We have him neatly treed. What shall the lesson be like?" he queried, with a look of roguish fun.

He had seen Tim sneak in and hide himself behind the willow. He had failed to perceive Bess, who had come back as if drawn by an invisible chain. She crouched behind a corner of the house, looking on the unconscious pair with eyes that burned with indignation.

And he was equally ignorant that Dug-Out was observing him through the window of the cottage.

If all this had been known to the fun-loving pair they would doubtless have acted very differently. As it was they walked up toward the tree that concealed the jealous lover, talking with a great show of mutual sympathy.

"Then you don't love that spindle-shanked, curried-down, cross-eyed snip of a tenderfoot?" queried Flash.

"Love him!" she rejoined, with a roguish look. "How can you ask? After all I've acknowledged, too."

"But you girls are so queer. Why, he hangs on to you like a burr to a sheep's wool."

"I let him do that just for fun. He's so wonderfully fresh, you know; and so amazingly green."

"If I thought you did have a fancy for him—"

"Oh, you dear boy, how can you think so?"

Her look was so irresistible, and her face so charming in its assumed tenderness, that Flash slipped his arm round her waist and the sound of a kiss was heard in the air.

Linda sprung from him angrily. For the moment she seemed as if about to break out with an indignant exclamation, but it ended in a laugh.

"You rogue!" she said, shaking her finger at him as she ran away.

She suddenly paused, and pointed behind the tree.

"Mercy on us! look what's here," she cried, with a show of consternation.

Thus discovered Tim made his appearance, bristling like a chestnut-burr with rage.

"Base vile conspirators!" he cried furiously. "Soulless ingrates! I shall be revenged! I shall—"

"Hillo, Timothy!" cried Flash, facing him with an air of surprise. "Where did you sprout up from? And what seems to be the difficulty? Been eating something that don't agree with you, eh?"

"Villain! I shall chastise you!" screamed Tim, rushing forward with clinched fists and gleaming eyes.

"Don't! It might hurt," was Flash's mocking rejoinder.

But the dude was worked up to fighting pitch. He made a desperate blow at his rival. It did not reach its goal, however, for Flash caught his wrist, and twisted his arm till he brought him down to his knees.

"Hit me, will you!" cried Flash, grinding his teeth with a great show of rage. "Now what have you got to say for yourself, before I make hash of you? Beg my pardon, and Miss Melton's, or I'll teach you a Wild West lesson."

Tim, who was in mortal pain from the twist which Flash still gave his arm, blurted out:

"Oh, let me up! You're killing me!"

"Not till you beg pardon."

"Never.—Oh!" as there came another twist. "Let me up! I beg everybody's pardon. I'll do anything! I'll be anything—only let me up!"

Thus abjectly implored, Flash released him.

"Now glide, little one. Don't come barking round my heels again. I might step backward without seeing you, you know. If I should happen to tread on you there wouldn't be a grease-spot left."

Grinding his teeth with rage Tim jerked out: "Low-lived dog! I'll have revenge! On the honor of a Spruce, I swear to have revenge!"

He rushed away in an opposite direction to that taken by Miss Melton, so full of rage as to be almost dangerous. Flash followed him with a laugh of amused contempt.

"Poor little monkey!" he said. "I do believe he's mad enough to bite."

At this moment two other persons made their appearance, very much to Flash's surprise. Dug-Out came from the door of the cottage, Bess from her lurking-place.

Bess's eyes were fiery with indignation as she ran up, as if she meant to assail him.

"There she goes! Go after her!" she cried, pointing in the direction in which Linda had disappeared. "You can have your white-faced girl. I never want to see you again. I hate you! I hate you! There!"

She whisked away in a fury, fiery with pain and indignation.

"Hey! Stop, Bess!—whew!" he whistled, as she disappeared. "Here's a stew! Did she hear all that?"

"Every word on't an' you've a'most broke her heart," said Dug-Out, advancing. "I'm clean ashamed o' ye, Flash. Arter my bringin' up, too."

"But, gracious! how was I to know she was looking on? I've put my foot in it now, deep."

"You had no business to deceive her. The gal thinks you love her. Oh, Flash, I wouldn't ha' believed it of you."

"Believed what?"

"That you'd ha' played little Bess sich a trick,

while you was makin' love to that other gal, that don't keer as much fur you as fur one of her kid gloves."

"But I don't care for her either."

"You don't?"

"No. Didn't you see we were only playing a game on that dude? Just trying to make him jealous? Why, if I'd known Bess was there, I'd have cut my head off first."

"Is this sound? Honest Injun?"

"Every word of it. Linda don't love me any more than I love her."

"Then guv us yer hand ag'in, Flash. I'm proper sorry as I thought little of you. I brung you up to be squar', and you are squar'. Now, come inside; I've got somethin' to say to ye."

They entered the house together, and the door closed behind them.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE GOLDEN FOLLY.

THE reader must now accompany us to a new scene, different from any in which we have yet been. From the free air, we must enter the heart of the mountain, deep into that tunnel which the old miner has dug in twelve years of hard labor.

On coming to Payrock, with a considerable sum of money which he had made in a California venture, Dug-Out had staked out a promising claim in the adjoining hills.

Havin' money enough to live on, he had worked steadily onward, led on by incessant promises, each of which ended in disappointment. But the old man was very sanguine, and, with the aid of Flash, toiled on, hoping yet to strike the gold which had so often cheated him.

Years before a shaft had been sunk into the hill by a rich company, and some ore taken out. But this vein had vanished, and after spending a large sum of money in the effort to discover it again, the company had abandoned the mine.

It was in the direction of this abandoned shaft that Dug-Out had sunk his tunnel. He knew he must be near it, though he did not know how near, when he came again upon the rich traces of ore of which he had spoken to Bess.

He had now been in the mine since early day, working away with untiring energy. The rock here was of a soft and friable nature, and every stroke of the pick told. About midday he had charged and fired a blast, and retired to await the explosion.

A roar like muffled thunder rung through the hills, as the dynamite cartridge did its work. Waiting until all danger was past, Dug-Out returned, eager and hopeful. This blast had been laid in the most promising part of the rock. Should he find the vein laid bare on his return?

The explanations above given are necessary as a preliminary to the description of what the old miner discovered.

Entering the mine, we find him standing the image of chagrin and despair before a ragged hole in the rocks, which opens into a wide, cave-like space.

Where he stands only the gleam of a miner's lamp lights up the scene, but the space beyond is illuminated by a much brighter light, that seems to come down from above.

"And is this the end of it all?" he cried, stamping angrily. "Arter twelve year o' hard labor—all flung to ther dogs! It's nough ter make a man shoot hisself I swow it is."

He was so discomposed that he failed to hear approaching footsteps. They were very light, indeed, for it was the slender and agile form of Bess Martin that was coming into the mine.

She stopped, and looked at him, and at the ragged cavity in surprise.

"What's the matter?" she demanded. "I come in, as I said I would, to see you strike the vein. What have you done, Uncle Dug-Out? You're lookin' awful out o' sorts."

"Hey, Bess! is that you, gal? It's lucky you came in, or I mought na' mined a hole in my head with ther pick. That's what's come o' twelve years' minin'!"

"But what is it? I don't understand."

"It's the old shaft. I've bu'sted through inter the old 'Golden Folly.' That's my pay-streak. I thought this last blast was goin to open ther vein, sure: and that's what's come of it. It's all up, gal. Ther's nothin left 'cept to pick up my tools and toddle home."

"But you saw good sign of gold," cried Bess excitedly. "There was gold took out of that mine, too. You're not goin' to give it up yet?"

"You dunno what ye're talkin' 'bout, gal. That settles it fur good." He pointed to the cavity.

"It doesn't do anything of the sort," cried



Bess positively. "Give me the pick. You've been trying a man's luck long enough. Let's try a girl's luck. What will you give me if I strike the vein?" she demanded, seizing a light pick that lay at her feet.

"Half the gold that's in it," rejoined Dug-Out, with a grim laugh. "I reckon that's a safe offer."

"Don't be too sure," exclaimed Bess. "I'm a sort of mascot, you know."

She hastened to a point near the entrance to the shaft where the blast had laid bare an area of soft rock.

The sharp pick sunk into it almost as if it had been clay. It came off in thick scales as Bess worked eagerly.

Dug-Out stood leaning on his heavy pick and looking on, while a smile curled his wrinkled lips.

"That's mighty good exercise fur a gal's arms," he said. "I reckon that's 'bout all it is."

Bess laughed back as she struck again. Instead of the soft thud of her previous blows this yielded a metallic ring. She gave a wrench with the instrument, and a heavy stone rolled out.

"Guess ye're 'bout done, gal," he remarked. "Ye're inter hard stuff now."

He carelessly picked up the stone as he spoke, and cast his eyes upon it. Instantly a light flashed into them, and he began excitedly to turn it over in his hands.

Suddenly he dropped it, raised his heavy pick over his shoulder, and sung out in a voice of thunder:

"Back, gal! Leave me thar!"

He pushed Bess away with a force that sent her reeling, and began to dig into the cavity with frantic energy.

A few blows and a much larger stone was loosened. He inserted the point of the pick under it, pried desperately, and it rolled out at his feet.

Dug-Out had been working like one beside himself. He now dropped the pick and began to examine this stone with eager eyes.

A moment, and then he sprung to his feet, flung his hat like a schoolboy into the air, and yelled out joyfully:

"Gold! gold, as I'm a livin' man! It's the vein! It's the vein at last! You've struck it, Bess, and it's half yours. We're rich, gal; rich as Vanderbilt."

"You ain't in earnest?"

"Never was in such earnest afore. Ther's gold streak all through that stone. Never saw nothin' pan out livelier."

Bess began to dance excitedly.

"To think that I done it! But it ain't mine. It's all yours. I won't have it."

"Don't you know Old Dug-Out better'n that? The gold's half yours, gal; and I won't take no from nobody."

"I won't have it."

"You shall have it. There—don't say another word. Don't you git me riled. I'm ugly when I'm riled."

At this moment there came a diversion. Rapid footsteps were heard approaching, and Flash sprung into the scene.

Nor was he the only one. A second person followed him at a short distance, in a secret and lurking fashion, as if scouting on his track.

This person remained concealed behind a corner of rock, though near enough to see and hear all that passed.

Utterly unaware that he had been followed, Flash hastened forward, and stood looking with surprise on the excited faces of Bess and Dug-Out.

"What's up?" he demanded hastily. "You look as if you'd stirred up a rattlesnake, or dropped into a gold-mine. Which is it?"

"Thar's the rattler," said Dug-Out, pointing to the stone. "Git yer eyes on that. You know somethin' 'bout metal."

Flash did so, examining it critically.

"My stars, it's gold!" he ejaculated. "You've struck it rich."

"Nary time. Tain't me. It's this gal as struck it. All I did was to blast inter ther Golden Folly. Don't let nothin' out in Payrock, fur I want ter keep this shady jist now. Ther' mought be some fool makin' trouble 'bout ther old mine. I tell you, boy, Bess and me, we're capitalists."

"Bess!" cried Flash in surprise. "Can that be so? Bess struck the vein? That's prime. Give me your hand on it, Bess."

He advanced with extended hand and joyful face. But Bess, who had drawn back on his entrance, now placed her hands behind her, and said coldly:

"There's a fortune in it for you. I've got nothing to do with it."

"Hillo, gal, what bee's in yer bonnet now?" cried Dug-Out, as Flash drew back in surprise. "I say it's half yours, and I mean it."

"And I say I won't have any of it. He can go to his Miss Melton, and take her his money. I won't disgrace him with my rags, and my ignorance, and my old aunt."

"Disgrace me? Why, you're crazy, girl! If anybody but you said that I'd break his head. Miss Melton! what do I care for her alongside of you? I care more for your little finger than for the whole of her."

"That's not so," cried Bess, breaking out in a rage. "You've said the same thing to her. I heard you. And I saw you put your arm around her and kiss her. You never did that to me."

"You wouldn't let me; that's why. I've tried it, you know that."

"I never will let you. I hate you! You can take your money to Miss Melton."

"But, Bess—"

"You laughed when she made fun of me. I heard you."

"Why, Bess—"

"You did! I heard you. And I never want to see you again!"

She rushed away in a torrent of passion.

"Now, Bess, do listen—"

"I won't! I don't want to hear another word. I won't be in your way with Miss Melton. Good-by, forever!"

She hurried away, leaving Flash in an agony of surprise and dismay.

While this went on, none of them observed the figure that was hidden behind the rock, looking on with eyes of satisfied triumph.

It was Tim Spruce, who had followed Flash into the mine full of revengeful thoughts.

"They have found gold," he said, "and want to keep it quiet, for fear the Golden Folly folks may lay a claim. I'll tell everybody. I'll spread it all over Payrock. And see if I don't let Linda know how this clown has been making love to a rag-patch. I'll let him see that no one can insult a Spruce with impunity."

He withdrew cautiously, leaving the old miner and Flash in conversation. In his spiteful disposition, he fancied that he had the means to do his rival an injury.

He had hardly got outside the mine before he met a person whose face was strange to him. It was Abel Griscom, who was prowling around there, revolving in his evil mind schemes to make him even with Flash. He was not one to readily forgive the trick that had been played on him.

Tim Spruce found a more interested auditor than he had expected. Griscom listened with the utmost attention to the story of the finding of the vein of gold.

"It's all clear," he remarked. "They want it kept secret, because it's in the old Golden Folly claim. It does not belong to them. I have it—You don't like these people?"

"I hate them worse than I hate snakes!"

"Then come with me. We'll see what can be done. I hate them, too. Come."

He led Tim away, revolving in his mind schemes of vengeance. The information which Griscom had received was worth much to one as shrewd and unscrupulous as he. The old miner and his protégé were in far greater danger than they dreamed of.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CLIMAX OF THE PLOT.

WE must pass on to the second day after the scene of the discovery. During the preceding day Dug-Out had worked diligently at the vein, and uncovered it sufficiently to prove that there was no mistake, that there was gold in abundance.

But it lay on the very edge of the Golden Folly claim. The old mining property might be bought up for a song. He had better try to secure this before the news of his find got abroad. It would not be comfortable to find a troublesome claimant to the product of his twelve years' labor.

That night something else had happened in the town. Three of the road-agents imprisoned in the lock-up had broken out and made their escape. The fourth was too much hurt to accompany them.

How it had been done no one knew, but there was reason to believe that they had help from without. The escape was not agreeable to the townsmen, for they had about made up their minds to hang the whole party. But pursuit proved useless; the fugitives were not to be found.

Near nightfall of the day in question a group of men were collected in a mountain ravine not very far away from Payrock. Two of these, rifle in hand, were on guard at the up and down entrances to the ravine. They were two of the escaped road-agents.

Two other men stood in an open space in the center. They were Abel Griscom and Jerry Jacobs, who were engaged in earnest conversation.

"Revenge and gold—they are two things worth working for," remarked Griscom.

"Revenge is enough," returned Jacobs, rubbing his back, with a wry face. "O' course, I don't object to the gold. But—a sore back wants to be cured by a sore head."

"They laid it on heavy, then?"

"I fought like a tiger," rejoined Jerry, with a great show of courage. "But what could one man do against a dozen? I must have knocked down ten of them, and if these fellows had only come to my help. But a man can't make bulldogs out of cowards."

"That's true," rejoined Griscom, smiling grimly, "except by the help of his tongue."

"If I'd only had one good man to help me," declared Jacobs. "But what can one do against twenty?"

"Dry up, Jerry; you're wasting your powder. Save that for green goslings. There's nothing left but to get satisfaction for your sore back."

"Say how," cried Jerry, viciously. "I'm open for anything."

"You know about the find in the mine. I have laid my plan to lure everybody who is in our way into the mine to-morrow—then—"

"Well, what then?"

"A huge rock overhangs the entrance to the mine. It is loosely poised. A dynamite cartridge exploded under its upper edge will lift it and hurl it over the entrance."

"And bury them all alive?"

"Under five hundred tons of rock. It will take a week for all Payrock to open the tunnel again, and long before that time there will be only dead bodies inside."

Jacobs stood in silent reflection, with Griscom's eyes fixed meaningfully on his face.

"Well," he asked, harshly, "you're not afraid?"

"It's like wholesale murder."

"What would you do to get rid of that sneak, Flash?"

"I'd murder a dozen!" cried Jerry, viciously.

"That's one thing. Another is, I've laid my plans to buy the Golden Folly claim. The vein will be ours."

"Are you ready to say halves?"

"Yes."

"Then here's my hand on it."

"Good." He shook Jerry's hand as cordially as if they had just completed some honest bargain. "I have one of our men at work now clearing out a cavity behind the rock. He is working under cover of thick bushes, and by night will have a hole ten feet deep, between the two rock surfaces. Then we have only to sink the cartridge, fix everything for the explosion, and all will be ready."

"When will it be done?"

"To-morrow. My man will lie hidden waiting for the signal, which is to be the waving of a white handkerchief. Then off goes the cartridge and down comes the rock. My plans are laid to get everybody whom we fear in the mine."

"How?"

"Through the help of that New York dude."

"Can you trust him?"

"Trust him? Yes, to play the fool. Dug-Out and Flash will be there, working at the vein. I want the girl and the dude. Then we have all that know the secret."

"The dude? Is that the way you are going to pay him for his help?"

Griscom laughed unfeelingly.

"There will be only one fool less in the world. He won't be missed out of the vast total of fools."

"But the girl, Bess. She's so confounded pretty, and I've got such a hankering after her."

"What's come of your hankering? First, a souse in a duck-pond; next, a roping on the bare back that's enough to cure twenty lovers. You want another dose of the same sort, do you?"

"No," cried Jerry, gritting his teeth viciously. "Go on, I'm with you through the whole game."

Some further conversation ensued between the worthy pair in which they considered the details of their villainous plan. It had been skillfully



laid, and if the dynamite charge did its work, there seemed every reason to look for success.

But we must leave these reprobates to their night's rest, and go on to the next day, and to the vicinity of the mine.

It was not long after daybreak when Dug-Out, accompanied by Flash, each with nimble tread and hopeful face, entered the mine.

So far as Griscom's plan was concerned, they were in the trap. There was little danger that they would leave their gold—in promise, before nightfall.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning that Tim made his appearance. He was accompanied by Linda Melton. A reconciliation seemed to have taken place between them, for they were chatting freely.

Her presence can be easily accounted for. Tim, too full of the marvel of Dug-Out's discovery to hold his tongue, had told her the story of the golden find, whereupon she insisted on his taking her into the mine. She was too eager to see the golden discovery for delay.

Thus, by an unexpected chain of circumstances, another victim was prepared for Griscom's murderous scheme.

Jerry Jacobs, who was on the watch near the entrance to the mine, saw this pair enter the tunnel, and instantly hurried to Griscom to report.

"I didn't see how to get Bess in. Jealousy will do it," he declared. "If she knows that that girl and Flash are together in the mine, ropes wouldn't keep her out. But how is it to be done? She won't listen to me."

"Leave it to me," said Griscom. "I fancy I can manage that."

He started at once on this promising errand, leaving Jerry still on guard.

His mission proved successful; in less than an hour afterward Bess made her appearance at the mine mouth. She was flushed and eager, as if full of jealous suspicion.

Shortly afterward Griscom reappeared. "Is it time?" he asked Jerry. "Are they all within?"

"I think so," answered Jerry. "But I have been away from my post for ten minutes. Our man above there signaled, and I went up to him."

"What did he want?"

"Nothing but a chew of tobacco."

"The hound! You should not have stirred. Some of them may have left the mine in your absence."

"That's not likely."

"I never take chances," rejoined Griscom, sternly. "This thing has got to be done, once for all. We must slip inside to see if they are still all there. If one should be out it would be fatal to our whole game."

Leaving word with their confederates, who had been placed on guard in such localities that they could transmit the signal when given to the man concealed above the mine-mouth, the brace of villains entered the tunnel together.

They were soon in deep darkness. They did not dare carry a light and had to grope their way through the cavernous opening.

Meanwhile events of vital interest were taking place inside the mine.

We must go back for some time before the period we have now reached and trace these events.

Dug-Out and Flash had been working diligently since morning, and had prepared and set off a blast which tore down a considerable quantity of rock.

They had just returned to examine the effect of the blast, when Tim and Linda made their appearance. She ran forward excitedly, forsaking her cavalier and hurrying to Flash.

"Tell me all about it!" she cried. "Is it true that you have found gold? Let me see it. I am so interested."

Dug-Out looked up angrily from among the fallen rocks over which he was bending.

"Who told you that?" he asked.

"He did," she replied, pointing to Tim.

"And how came you to know 'bout it?" he demanded, advancing to Tim, who shrunk back from his stern looks.

"I—I come in here and saw—and heard—"

"Spyin', was you? you tailor's runaway prentice! Blame my eyes, if I ain't got half a mind to squash ye like a 'tater-bug! I hate spies wuss nor I hate p'ison!"

"I—I wasn't spying—I only—"

"Dry up, and keep outer my reach, 'cause I'm ugly when I'm riled. Vamoose, you beetle, while yer skin's whole."

The old man looked so fierce that Tim drew back involuntarily into the dark part of the mine, where he crouched half-concealed in mortal fear of the irate old miner.

Meanwhile Flash was showing Linda the gold-trace in the rock, and explaining its character to her.

"Tell me all about it. It is very interesting. I want to know how the find was made."

Thus requested, Flash told the story, first obtaining her promise to keep it a secret.

"And it was really little Bess that found it!" she cried, excitedly. "That's very surprising. Tell me all the rest. I want to know all that happened."

Flash grew sober-faced as he proceeded with the story of Bess's jealousy and of the scene that had passed between them. But his listener laughed at it as if it were an excellent joke.

"That's too good for anything!" she cried, excitedly. "Jealous of me and you! Well, I never thought of that. And, do you know, you've got Tim ready to cut your throat? You never saw any one in such a rage as he has been."

"Where is he?" asked Flash.

"Yonder. Old Dug-Out has scared him frightfully."

"Jealous, is he? Come, we must give him something to be jealous for."

"No more kissing, you rogue."

"But some hand-pressing is admissible," laughed Flash, clasping both her hands in his.

"And soft words are never thrown away."

"If thrown at me, I fancy they would be," she replied.

Yet the pair looked very loving as they stood there clasped hand in hand, their eyes fixed on each other, and their voices sunk to low, murmuring tones.

Tim glowered from his corner, lost in mind between fear of Dug-Out and rage at the seeming lovers.

But there was another spectator of whom they had not dreamed. For at this instant Bess made her appearance in the mine.

Her face was deeply flushed as she emerged from the darkness into the lamplight, and her eyes gleamed with angry fire as they fell on the masquerading pair.

"Mercy on us, Bess!" cried Flash, starting back with a haste that redoubled the guilty seeming of his attitude.

"Bess!" echoed Linda, turning hastily toward her jealous rival.

"Yes!" she hotly exclaimed. "And I never want to see one of you again—not one of you again! After all you said. Oh, Flash!"

She crouched down with an aspect of hopeless misery, burying her face in her hands.

"But we were only joking!" exclaimed Flash excitedly. "We did not mean anything."

"That is true," repeated Linda.

"It is false! It is false! I don't believe it," she moaned, rocking herself in a helpless fashion.

"Oh, come, Bessy!" cried Dug-Out. "Nary one of 'em ain't wuth your goin' on so 'bout."

"He said he loved me!" cried the distressed girl. "He lied to me and deceived me!"

"It isn't so," cried Flash desperately. "I'd like to hear anybody but you say that. I tell you we were only in fun."

He took hold of her and attempted to lift her, but she broke from his grasp and darted away, crying:

"Don't touch me! Don't lay your hands on me! I never want to speak to you again! Never! never! never!"

He stood dazed and irresolute, turning angrily toward Linda.

"What did you make me do this for?" he asked, hardly knowing what he said.

"I make you?" she rejoined as angrily. "It was all your own doing."

"That is so," cried Tim, rushing in a rage from his covert. "He has been making love to you straight on! I've seen him! I've watched him!"

Bess looked up at this.

"I know it! I know it!" she moaned. "He has lied to me!"

"Yes," cried Tim. "That is it. He has lied to you. He has been making love to two at once, and cheating both."

"What!" ejaculated Flash, his excitement breaking into rage as it found an object to vent itself upon. "What, you mule's doctor! you tenth part of a man! you polished atomy! Do you tell me I lie?"

"Yes, you lie!" yelled Tim, beside himself with jealous fury.

With one bound Flash was on him, and had seized him by the collar. A quick surge and Tim was lifted in his strong arms, and dashed again on the rocky floor.

"That for you, you fool!" cried the incensed lover. "There, I can't stay here any longer!"

I'll burst if I do! Tell Bess the truth, I must get into the air."

He rushed madly away, too wild with excitement to know what he was doing. The next moment he passed Griscom and Jacobs without seeing them. They had beheld the scene we have just described, and were making their way out again to finish their devilish plot.

But the way was unknown to them, and they stumbled over obstacles which Flash shot past. He was in the open air and a hundred yards from the mouth of the mine, while they were still a considerable distance within.

Then he paused a moment in his flight and drew out his handkerchief to wipe off the sweat that stood in beads on his face. He gave the white handkerchief a flirt in the air as he did so.

Ere he could restore it to his pocket and resume his flight, there came a thunder-like roar that seemed to tear the hills asunder. A crashing sound followed. Flash was struck as by a cyclone and dashed stunned to the ground.

He had unknowingly given the signal, and the dynamite charge had been exploded! The vast rock had fallen, fatally sealing up the mouth of the mine, and imprisoning the two villains along with their intended victims!

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE OLD MINE SHAFT.

A HUGE rock, split from the parent mountain as if by some earthquake of the far past, had loomed over the spot at which Dug-Out had begun his tunnel into the mountain-side. He had not feared it. It had stood there for hundreds of centuries, and probably would for as long a time in the future.

And yet it overhung so that it only needed a giant push in the cavity between it and the mountain to move it from its base and hurl it below.

This Griscom had seen at a glance, and guessed at once that a charge of dynamite would give the push needed to overturn the rock. He was right; the violent explosive had caused the huge mass to topple and fall, and it now lay so as to completely choke up the mouth of the mine, imprisoning along with their victims the villains who had devised this murderous scheme.

Five minutes passed after the explosion. Then one of the ruffianly band came cautiously down the hillside and stood gazing on the result of the explosion.

Soon after another appeared, with a face in which awe was mingled with villainy.

"It's down?" he demanded.

"Yes. Where's Jake?"

"Gone under. Passed in his checks. The idiot got too close, and a splinter o' stone tuk him under the chin and shaved the hull top of his head off."

"The deuce! That's sudden. I allers said Jake was too venturous. Now, where's our men?"

"Somewhar round yere. It was jist t'other side that bush the handkercher waved."

"I never seen nothin' neater done. Tell yer what, I like that Griscom."

"He's a hull team, sure."

As they spoke they came near the spot where Flash had fallen. Suddenly there rose before them a tall, nimble, athletic figure with a face that burned with indignation.

It was Flash, who had heard their whole conversation. His quick wit told him not only what had happened, but the way it had been done, and his own involuntary share in it.

He rose before the two ruffians like a vision of vengeance.

"You want to know what has become of Griscom and Jacobs?" he thundered.

"Yes," faltered one of the men, as he recognized the form and face of their late prisoner.

"The pair of them are caught in their own trap. They were inside the mine, and it was I that waved the handkerchief and gave the signal."

"The fury you did!" cried one of the villains, in a rage, drawing a pistol.

A quick lift of Flash's foot, and the weapon went ringing against the rocks.

The next instant he sprang upon the two men, dealing blows to right and left with a strength and skill that broke down their defenses and quickly stretched both of them on the ground.

Ere they could rise again Flash had recovered the fallen pistol and covered them with the deadly weapon.

"The first of you that tries to get up is a dead man. And you can take my word for it that there's no bunkum in that," he said, decisively.



At this moment a new figure appeared on the scene. It was the form of Molly Martin, who rushed in bonnetless and with her hair flying loose.

"What is it?" she ejaculated. "'Tain't an earthquake, nor nothin' sich, hey? It shook all the winders out o' my house."

"You can see what it is," rejoined Flash, not taking his eyes an instant from his prisoners. "Run to Payrock. Send everybody you see out here. Tell them there's a half-dozen souls buried alive in Dug-Out's mine and help's wanted the worst way."

The old woman needed no further words. One glance told her the whole story of what had occurred.

She turned and darted away with the speed of a much younger person.

One of Flash's prisoners was yet dazed with the violence with which his head had struck the rock. The other was alert, and at this instant made a sudden effort to rise.

A flash and report followed, and a pistol-bullet went through the arm with which he was lifting himself from the ground. Down he went with a groan of pain.

"The next bullet will go through your head," declared Flash, in stern accents. "It will save rope to put the pair of you out of the way on the spot, and I'll do it, as I'm a living man, if you don't lie still!"

This significant warning sufficed; no further attempt to rise was made.

For fifteen minutes the scene continued unchanged, the young miner standing like a stern warder over his prostrate captives, the cocked revolver in his hand, and his eyes fixed on them with keen glances.

Then footsteps approached, and several men rushed over the adjoining hill-crest, calling to one another in eager accents as they did so.

"Hello, Flash Lightning! Is it you, lad? What's up? Ha! the mine's sealed in earnest, as the old woman said! What coons have you there? Was it them that did it?"

"They had a hand in it," rejoined Flash. "The ringleaders are inside. These are two of the fellows that broke jail. The other one has got his settling dose. Tie those rascals, and then we'll investigate the mischief."

It did not take long to obey his suggestion. In a minute or two the prisoners, who made no resistance, were securely bound hand and foot. The miners left them lying helplessly on the rock while they went to investigate the disaster.

It was quickly apparent that it was a most awkward one. The fallen rock was solid and huge in dimensions. It could only be removed by blasting, and it might take a week to reopen the mine.

All listened with the utmost attention to Flash's account of the affair. A growl of satisfaction passed as they learned how neatly the villains had been caught in their own trap; but it was followed by a shudder of apprehension when they learned who had been imprisoned in the closed mine.

"To think that I did it!" cried Flash, in desperation. "It was I that ignorantly signaled for the explosion, and I shall never forgive myself."

"That's all sentimentality, Flash," enjoined one of his hearers. "You couldn't be expected to know. It's them two hounds back there that done it. I vote we hang them on the spot."

This suggestion found many seconding voices, and only for Flash's interference the brace of captives would have had a short shrift.

"No," he declared. "They are my prisoners, and I say the law must have its way. I hardly think they'll escape Payrock justice with sound necks," he concluded grimly.

By this time many others had gathered, the alarming news having spread with great rapidity through the town. Some of the experienced miners were examining the lay of the rock. They shook their heads gloomily as they finished.

"There's no chance for a soul inside," they declared. "The mine-opening is sealed up airtight. There's no chance for a breath of fresh air to get in, and what's inside will be foul before many hours. They can't live long in that corked-up bottle of a mine."

Flash listened silently to this serious declaration, which threw a shade of gloom over all faces present. Then with a sudden movement of joy he struck his knee with his palm.

"Fool that I was!" he declared, "what made me forget? They'll have all the fresh air they want, and if all goes well we'll have them out before night."

"What do you mean?" cried the miners, look-

ing at him in surprise. "That rock can't be stirred."

"The old Golden Folly shaft," he replied. "I had forgotten it."

"The Golden Folly shaft?"

"Yes. Dug-Out blasted through into it three days ago. He has a hole now big enough to drive an ox-team through. There's an open way for air and light, and for rescue, too. A windlass and rope will bring them out. Hey, lads! all's safe yet. Let's to work."

A shout of joy rose from all within hearing distance of this cheering news. The story quickly spread from mouth to mouth, and a rush of the more nimble of the auditors took place for the mouth of the old shaft, far up the rugged hillside.

Alert as some of them were Flash soon left them all in the rear, borne upward by love and hope. Not many minutes passed ere he stood at the opening to the long-abandoned mine, that was now buried in a thick growth of bushes.

Breaking through these, he reached the edge of the wall-like opening. It was a deserted and dreary spot. The strong windlass, by which tons of rock had been drawn to the surface had long since decayed and fallen in. Only its rotten standards remained on the two sides of the shaft.

As he stood gazing downward the others arrived one by one and grouped themselves around him.

"We must rig up a windlass and get a rope and basket," cried one. "Does anybody know how deep is the shaft?"

"About six hundred feet," rejoined another, "and I'm ready to bet there's not half enough of rope in all Payrock. Rope's a thing as ther' ain't much call for here, 'cept to hang road-agents and sich."

"The rope must and shall be had!" cried Flash, decisively. "To know what's to be done, that's half the battle. Let's to work at once and see what the chances are."

The party broke and dispersed. Their late gloom had vanished, and the utmost hope and activity now prevailed.

By the time they reached the town the whole region had been stirred up by the distressing news. Dug-Out and Bess were universal favorites among the people of the town, while the news that Linda Melton was among the imprisoned party added to the excitement.

The tidings soon reached her father, who was distracted with grief and fear on learning his daughter's peril.

The search for rope was diligently prosecuted; every scrap that could be found in the town was collected and measured; the result was disappointing. There was still a hundred feet wanting.

"There's not another scrap to be had nearer than Melrose, and that's a good fifty miles away, and the road blasted rough," declared one of the townsmen.

"If there wasn't any nearer than New York we'd have it," exclaimed Flash. "There's some good horses in the town. Lend me one to ride and one for a relay, and if it's in the wood, I'll reach Melrose, get the rope, and be back before eight to-morrow."

"You shall have the best horses in my stable; and I've got good ones," exclaimed Mr. Melton; "and money to buy all the rope in the State. And if you only rescue my daughter, you shall have my blessing to boot."

"There are those inside whom I would give my head to rescue," rejoined Flash. "Rig up the windlass while I am gone. That will take time. Make it good and strong, for there are valuable lives depending on it."

"Leave that to me," answered Mr. Melton. "I will see that all is ready."

In less than an hour afterward Flash galloped out of the town, and struck into the mountain road that led to Melrose. The horse he bestrode was a vigorous gray, that stretched out with long strides which took him rapidly over the ground.

He led a spare horse for a remount, for he well knew that those rough mountain roads were terribly exhausting to horseflesh.

All hearts followed him with hope as the thud of his horses' hoofs died away in the distance. They knew that Flash would be back on time if he was alive to return.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### IN A MOUNTAIN PRISON.

INSIDE the mine, consternation reigned supreme. The roar of the falling rock came like thunder to the ears of those within, while a

rush of air followed that almost flung them to the ground.

For a minute or two they stood staring at each other with blanched faces and trembling limbs.

"What can it be?" cried Linda. "Is it an earthquake?"

"Or a cyclone!" asked Bess.

Dug-Out had dropped his pick at the sound and stood in an attitude of strained attention. But intense silence had followed the momentary roar.

After a moment he seized a lamp and rushed toward the mine entrance.

"Wait!" he commanded.

Fifteen minutes of terrible suspense passed. When he returned, his face was blanched till not a drop of blood seemed left in it.

"We are buried alive," he explained, briefly. "The great rock over the mine has fallen. There is nothing left for us but to say our prayers and prepare for death."

A chorus of cries followed this startling announcement. Bess snatched the lamp from the old miner's hand and sprang forward.

"Flash is buried under it! I know he is!" she cried, in tones of terror.

She ran wildly toward the entrance. But she had not advanced far before she started back in quick alarm. Two human figures had suddenly appeared in the narrow tunnel!

She ran back, followed by these figures. A minute more brought them into the open rays of the light.

Dug-Out gazed at them with a feeling which it would have been difficult to analyze. He recognized them at sight as Abel Griscom and Jerry Jacobs.

The old man grasped the handle of his pick, while he fixed his eyes on these unexpected visitors, who were trembling with terror.

"What brings you here?" he demanded, sternly. "What have you had to do with this?"

The two men bore very different aspects. Griscom was white, but grim and silent. Jacobs was ashy in color and scared until his teeth chattered.

"Forgive us!" he cried. "We've all got to die together. Oh, it's too dreadful to think of! The thing went off too soon!"

"What thing?" cried Dug-Out, as the scared villain blurted out these significant words. "Ha! It went off like a blast! Ther thing was dynamite! It's your doin's!"

His fingers seemed to knot themselves into the wood of the pick-handle, as he sprang forward with blazing eyes.

"If you did it, by the Lord Harry—"

Jacobs sprang back with a yell of fright, but Griscom stood his ground.

"We are all prisoners together," he said. "If we die we must die together. This fool has let out all he knew, so it's no secret. We did design to imprison you in the mine. We are caught with you. That is the whole story. I could kill you before you could reach me, old man, if I chose. But as we now stand it is no time to think of killing."

Dug-Out checked himself at these words, and stood irresolute, though his eyes still blazed with anger.

"Where's the boy?" he shouted. "Where's Flash? If you've done anything to him, by Heaven, I'll—"

He lifted the pick and shook it significantly in the air.

"He is safe. He ran past us and out of the mine," Griscom hastened to explain. "We tried to follow him, but were too late." He shuddered as he spoke.

"It was he did it!" cried Jacobs in terror. "He gave the signal!"

"Liar!" yelled Dug-Out, stepping toward the speaker with a look that made him leap back in mortal fear.

"It is true," broke in Griscom firmly. "The waving of a white handkerchief was the signal. He must have done it."

"It is false!" cried Bess, springing forward excitedly. "Flash never done that! He'd die first. Whoever says he did is liar from head to foot!"

She faced Griscom like a wounded lioness. All her recent anger at Flash had disappeared in her indignation at this accusation.

"I didn't say he did it on purpose," Griscom explained. "But any one might have done it by accident."

"Hounds and murderers!" cried Dug-Out, again advancing with brandished weapon; "your devilish plot is all out now, and I'd brain the pair of ye on the spot, only I'd sooner see ye die a slower death. Ye're caught in yer



own trap, and have got to stand the consequences. O'ny ye'd best git out o' my sight, or I mayn't be able to hold myself in."

His eyes flamed with such fury that Jacobs ran in terror into the dark tunnel. Griscom followed him, scared, despite himself, by the old man's evident fury.

Dug-Out stood for a moment as if half-inclined to follow and brain them then and there. But as other thoughts came into his mind he flung down the pick and staggered back to the heap of broken stone behind him. Here he seated himself and buried his face in his hands, overcome with grief at the thought of what had happened.

In his mingled anger and consternation he had paid no attention to the others, who were fellow-captives with him in the mine.

The effect of the explosion on Bess we have seen. At first her jealousy and despair had hindered any other feeling from entering her mind. Then came a revulsion of feeling as she sprung up in defense of Flash against the charge made by his enemies.

All this had suddenly steeled her against terror, and she now looked round for her prisoner-companions.

She saw them crowded close together near the rocky side of the mine. Linda was deathly pale, and moaning as if overwhelmed with fear. Tim lay in a limp ball beside her, looking up into her face as if for hope and consolation.

Bess threw herself on the floor beside them, clasped Linda impulsively in her arms, and sought to console her.

"Don't take on so!" she pleaded, soothingly. "It's dreadful; but Flash is outside. He'll do something. He won't leave us to die here."

"Oh, will he? Can he?" demanded Linda, with hope in her heart.

"You don't know him. He'd move the mountain to get us out. He's so strong, and so noble, and— Oh, Flash! to think of it! To think of it!"

She buried her face in her hands, and burst into tears, as a sudden revulsion of feeling came over her.

"I don't want him to get me out! I'd sooner die than have him get me out!" cried Tim, starting in a fury of jealousy to his feet. "I hate him! He has robbed me of my love!"

"And broke my heart!" exclaimed Bess, losing her embrace of Linda and pushing her angrily away. "You and he—you and he together! What do I care for that fallen rock? He has hurt me worse than if it had fallen on me and crushed out my life."

Jealous anger had made two of the prisoners forget the peril of their situation in the outflow of other feelings. Their passion had a similar influence on Linda. She sprung to her feet, crying out:

"You are both mistaken. He has done nothing of the kind! It was all my doings. If you have anybody to blame, I am the one. Flash is not in fault."

"You?" they exclaimed in chorus.

"Yes. It was all done as a joke. I didn't mean to hurt anybody's feelings. I'll never joke again."

"You don't love him, then?" demanded Tim, with a change of countenance.

"No more than I love you!"

Tim drew back as if he had received a rebuff.

"And he don't love you?" queried Bess.

"No more than I love him."

"But I saw you making love to each other on the porch. Oh, I can't believe you! You wouldn't do that for a joke!"

"You don't know what I'd do for a joke," retorted Linda, angrily. "You had no business to act the spy on us. It wasn't right or lady-like in you. All we wanted to do was to make Tim jealous."

"That's so," cried Old Dug-Out, who had been listening. "I heerd 'em confabing together, and that's all true. They both was just funnin'."

"To make me jealous?" cried Tim.

"It was all done for that, sir!"

"But why—what—then you are sure that you and he ain't in love?" demanded Bess, her eyes full of hope.

"Not a bit of it! It was all in fun, I say. He loves nobody but you, you crazy girl."

"Oh, you dear, dear Linda!" exclaimed the happy girl, clasping the other in her arms, and kissing her impetuously. "You have made me so happy—so happy!"

"We didn't want to hurt your feelings, but—"

"But you don't mind hurting mine," Tim plaintively interrupted.

"We couldn't help it. You did make such a

fool of yourself with your bragging and your dandified airs."

"I never will again, if you'll only forgive me and love me a little. I'll forget New York, and wear cowhide boots and corduroy clothes, and swear, and drink whisky, and carry revolvers. I'll do anything to make you love me."

"Oh, Tim, for mercy's sake, not so bad as that!"

"Then you tell me what to do, and I'll do it. Anything for you. You say you don't love Flash any more than me. Do you love him as much?"

"Maybe not quite as much," she rejoined, with a roguish look.

"Then I don't care whether the rock tumbled or not," cried the now elate Tim. "I'll throw away my shoe-blackening. I'll quit using tooth-powder. I'll do anything you say."

He caught her hands and squeezed them in his joy till she winced and fairly cried out with pain.

"Mercy on us! I don't want to be eaten alive. I'll go back and make love to Flash again if you two don't let me alone."

There was a double groan of dismay as Bess and Tim released her from their grasp. It was followed by a merry laugh from her that contrasted strangely with her recent terror. For the moment stronger feelings had driven that of grief and dismay from all their hearts.

"Now, young folks," said Dug-Out, with some cheerfulness, "'tain't so bad to git chocked in if it's goin' to make sunshine where all were stormy weather. Jist you keep happy, fur Flash'll git us outer this, you kin count on that! Thar's the old shaft, as I furgot for the moment. He'll git at us that way, sure pop."

A burst of joy came from all at these words. It gave them hope where all had seemed hopeless. The old shaft! that was an unthought-of avenue of escape!

Yet, hour after hour passed and no sign of rescue came. Night approached, indicated by the fading of the light in the old shaft, for otherwise there was no difference between day and night in that underground world.

Fear began to take the place of hope in their hearts. Hours had gone yet no sign of rescue had come. And this fear deepened into terror as the lamps began to burn dim, the oil in them slowly giving out.

Yet, despite this reign of terror there was one happy heart in that mountain prison-house. Linda had come closer to Tim in her despair, and in remorse for her frivolity had suffered him to clasp her in his arms.

They were now crouched together in a corner of the excavation, the happy lover whispering words of hope and joy into her unhearing ears.

As for Bess it was bliss to her to find that Flash had not been false to her, and she dropped off to sleep with happiness in her soul despite the peril of the situation.

The two villains had not reappeared since driven away by the old miner's righteous indignation. They were hidden somewhere within the tunnel, a prey to the terrors they had prepared for others.

And so the night came down on those hapless yet not quite hopeless prisoners; the lights went out, and dense darkness prevailed; and slowly the hours of their captivity pulsed by.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### DOWN THE OLD SHAFT.

It was morning once more. There was no lamplight in the mine, and yet the darkness had disappeared. A vague light came down the old shaft, that dimly dispelled the Stygian gloom, and cast its enlivening rays to some distance into the darkness of the tunnel.

From the shadows of this two men rushed, and cast themselves at the feet of Old Dug-Out, who stood erect as an antique statue, looking down on them with eyes of scorn and distrust.

"Forgive us!" cried Griscom. "We have sinned terribly. Yet forgive us before we die!"

"You've been s'p'ret villains; ther's no question 'bout that," rejoined the old miner.

"My evil life has come upon me like a crushing load to-night," responded Griscom feelingly. "Providence is avenging my sins on my own head. If die we must, at least let us die with your forgiveness, against whom we have plotted such wrong."

"I'll never steal a pin again!" whined Jacobs, contritely.

"There; get up," commanded Dug-Out, with some softening of tone. "We're all in the same box, and ther's no use to harbor angry feelin's now. If ye're goin' to be good men hereafter I won't put nothin' in yer way; that ain't my way."

"We are," declared Griscom, rising with a very contrite aspect of countenance.

"Me too," broke in his companion.

"Jist show us some signs of it. That's all I ax fur. You've been playin' it heavy ag'in' Flash. Now let us know what's yer game."

"It was to get his property," replied Griscom.

"His father left a large fortune, which is waiting for an owner in New York. I am an uncle of the young man, and the nearest heir after him. But the courts have kept possession of the estate, for it was not sure that Mr. Bernard was dead."

"Among the papers you held there was only one I cared for. Under it I could have claimed the property, but Flash destroyed it. Then only one thing remained—to put him out of the way, prove to the court that he was dead, and enter my claim. I acknowledge that I have been a desperate villain. It is past now. I will never do a harmful act again."

"You didn't want to kill the hull of us to get Flash's property?" queried Dug-Out.

Griscom was silent. He had no words to answer this accusation. But Jacobs at once burst out:

"There ain't no use telling half a story. We knew you'd struck gold, and wanted to finger it ourselves—that's the truth, and nothing but the truth."

Dug-Out grasped his pick again, with a momentary return of his fiery anger. But he instantly released it and cried out:

"Ther' ain't no use harborin' ill feelin's when mebbe death is hoverin' over us all. I forgive ye; but don't do any more devil's work, fur if ye do, ther's got to be a settlement atween us, and a lively one, now you bet!"

Tim and the two girls had been listening to this conversation. But before anything further could be said, Bess sprung forward with gleaming eyes.

"Look there!" she cried, eagerly and hopefully. "See what's fallin'!"

As she spoke, a piece of white paper fluttered down the old shaft and struck the rocky floor almost at her feet.

With an exclamation of joy, she seized it and lifted it to her eager eyes. It was evidently written upon. Holding it where the light was strongest, she read:

"Keep your spirits up! All's right. Look for me down the shaft. And don't forget, darling Bess, that if I rescue you, you belong to 'FLASH.'"

Bess kissed the paper, while a flush of joy made her face almost radiant.

"Saved! Saved!" cried Tim. "I forgive him everything now."

"And do you forgive me, too?" asked Linda, archly.

"There is nothing left to forgive," he responded, clasping her hand. "That was done long ago. And I thank you both for curing me of my folly, and teaching me how to be a man."

"Saved! saved!" came from the others, and all eyes were fixed in eager hope and expectation upon the shaft.

But they were destined to a long wait. Slowly the minutes went by till more than hour had passed. Hope deferred began to change again to fear in some of their hearts. It grew darker also, a gloomy presage.

Dug-Out stepped into the opening and looked up it.

"I thought so," he said. "It's kinder closin' up. They're riggin' some plan to send a rope down."

As he spoke, a second white messenger fluttered downward and floated into the chamber.

There was just light enough to read this:

"Stand from under. I'm coming. FLASH."

The exclamations of joy redoubled. Dug-Out, in his sudden exhilaration of spirits, shook hands with everybody, not forgetting Griscom and Jacobs.

"Tell yer what," he shouted, "ther' ain't no lads like Flash. He's a hull circus, an' a lion an' a lamb in the bargain. It's my bringin'-up as done it. I swore I'd make a man of him, and I reckon I've did it."

"That you have," declared Griscom, seizing the hand of the old miner. "He's a different man from what he'd been if he'd had New York training, as the heir of a fortune. There's a specimen of city bringin'-up," and he pointed to Tim, with a look of contempt.

"Not a word against him," exclaimed Linda, her eyes flashing. "Do you think you are a fit judge of what is a man?"

"I have been an empty-headed dude, I confess it," rejoined Tim. "But I'm going to show



the world that I've got the stuff of a man in me."

"And I've been a little rag-patch," cried Bess, "but I'll let folks see that I can be as much of a lady as any of them, so I will."

"You've got half a gold-mine to do it on, Bess," declared Dug-Out. "Hal! it's gettin' darker." He looked up the shaft. "There's somethin' comin' down," he cried.

"It's Flash! it's Flash!" shouted Bess, clapping her hands and dancing in her joy.

All waited in deep suspense. Several minutes passed. Then there came a loud shout from above.

"Hello, below! Is all in trim?"

"Ay, ay!" yelled Dug-Out. "All's rosy, and the day's a-dawnin'."

"You bet it is!" came in Flash's cheery voice. "Stand from under!"

As he spoke, the bottom of a miner's bucket became visible, and, the next instant, Flash was fully revealed, with his feet on the edges of the bucket, and clinging to the rope.

"Hello, everybody!" he shouted, as he sprung from the bucket. "All here and all safe. Bess, my bonnie one, are you down on me yet?"

"No," she cried, as she rushed to his arms and held up her face to be kissed. "I've found it all out. I'll never doubt you again."

"And I'll never give you reason to. Daddy, here I am, and all's rosy."

The old man took him into his arms, and tears stood in his eyes as he bent his head as if in a silent prayer.

Flash next shook hands warmly with Linda, and took the proffered hand of Tim.

"You ain't got anything against me now?" he asked.

"No. I thank you for showing me what a fool I've been."

"Here's two more," said Dug-Out, pointing to Griscom and Jacobs. "Everything and everybody's forgiven, Flash. These men are sorry for what they've done. Guv 'em yer hand, boy."

Flash looked keenly into their faces, and there signs of contrition disarmed him, to some extent, of his hostile feeling.

"You tried to hang me," he said to Griscom. "I reckon if I get you out of this hole, that will be enough, without shaking hands on it."

"I have acted villainously, I know," rejoined Griscom. "I have been taught this night the terrible evil of my ways, and hope to be an honest man in future. And I am your uncle, your own father's half-brother."

"If that's the case, I won't mind touching hands," answered Flash, "though some things are not easily forgiven."

He shook hands with Griscom, but passed coldly by Jacobs's extended hand.

"I must go up again to report," he said. "I only came down to see if you were alive. They are preparing a basket to bring you up in. Good-by till we meet again!"

He stepped on the bucket, gave a signal, and quickly the rope began to ascend. In a minute he vanished again from sight.

But those left behind had not long to wait. The relief basket soon came down, and in an hour or two more all were standing on solid ground at the mouth of the Golden Folly shaft.

A more joyful party than surrounded that shaft had never been seen before in Colorado.

The procession back to the town had the aspect of a triumph, and there was a greater jollification in Payrock that night than had been known there since its first house was built. Every man, woman, and child was overflowing with joy in the happy rescue, and had it been their own dear ones who had been saved from that dreadful fate none could have been happier.

Dug-Out's fortune was made. He succeeded in buying up the abandoned Golden Folly claim, and in blasting away the giant rock that sealed up the entrance to his own property. The vein of ore he had struck proved rich beyond his expectations, and he was soon amply repaid for his many years of hard labor and deferred hopes.

He kept strictly to his word, however, that Bess, as the real finder of the vein, was to be half-owner of the mine. Half of its proceeds he put religiously aside for her, nor would he listen to any objections on her part to such an undue reward.

"It'll all be Flash's some day, anyhow," he declared, "and what's Flash's is as good as yourn, fur if that young dog don't splice you now I'll blow in the mine again."

At her own urgent wish Bess was sent to a good school in the East, where her progress in

study and manners was perfectly surprising, though she occasionally astonished her school-mates by an irrepressible outbreak of Payrock ways and language.

Before long Flash, too, took a journey East, accompanied by Griscom, and also by Dug-Out, who had no fancy for trusting his protégé with such an uncertain character.

They took with them the papers found in the burning wagon, with the exception of that which Flash had destroyed. Despite the loss of this, the most important of the lot, there was no difficulty in proving his claim to his father's estate, the documents, and Dug Out's testimony, convincing the court that he was the rightful heir.

The estate, therefore, a highly valuable one, was passed over to him by the courts.

But an Eastern city proved too narrow to hold the brave and resolute mountain-trained youth, and he soon made his way West again, leaving the landed portion of his property under the management of his uncle, Abel Griscom, whose reform seemed deep and lasting.

We cannot say as much for his associate in villainy, Jerry Jacobs. He was a rogue in grain, his vicious disposition too deep to be cured by a temporary fright; so no long time passed before his career came to a violent termination, at the hands of a sharp and sport who had caught him cheating at cards.

As for the road-agents in prison, a miner's court decided that their room in the world was better than their company, and a few feet of rope was given each as a passport to the next world.

And the dude and Linda Melton?

Well, they were on the happy list. Once convinced that he had been a fool, Tim soon proved that he had good stuff in him. He threw off all his dudish silliness, went to work vigorously in a mining venture, and before long gained Mr. Melton's hearty consent to a marriage with his daughter.

Linda had had from the first a lurking fancy for him, and soon learned that he was every inch a man. This marriage was conducted with such show and display as to prove quite an event in Payrock society.

Another wedding, which took place some two years later, was conducted with less display, but aroused much deeper feeling in the community, and all declared that Flash, or Julian Bernard, to give him his proper name, was the handsomest groom that the Rocky Mountains had ever seen, and that Bess Martin had developed into a bride more beautiful, and better trained in the arts of ladyhood, than many cities in the East could show. Their home-to-day in Payrock is one of the handsomest and happiest mansions in Colorado.

THE END.

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